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SENTRY OF THE SKY

EVELYN E. SMITH

AUTO-DA-FÉ

DAMON KNIGHT

AND STORIES BY...

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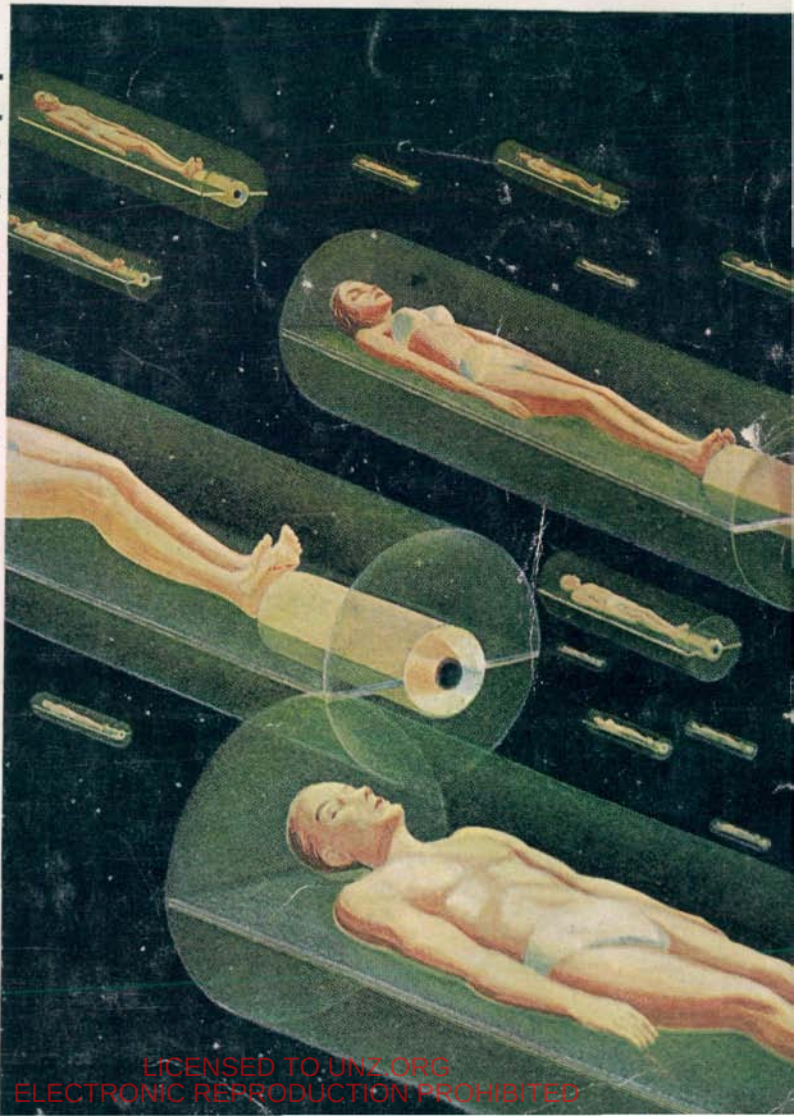

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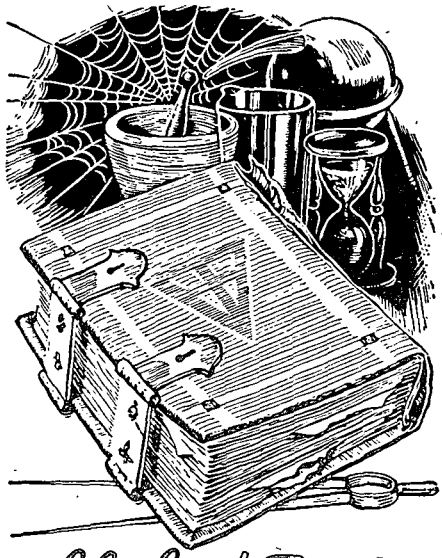

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TRUNK TO TAIL

IT'S a dismaying lot of years since I first said, "I'm psick of psi pstories," and yet the pstuff pstill comes out of authors.

This isn't personal. I would fight just as strenuously against a takeover by any one theme, whatever it might be, at the expense of all the others that science fiction should explore. And I did. There are cycles in themes — you can get robots until you can't look another in the photocell eye, and then comes time travel and you wish you had some robot stories on hand, and so forth.

An editor who wants science fiction to do its proper job — extrapolate into every aspect of civilization — sometimes has a bit of doing to do. For if the cycle is allowed to continue too long, science fiction would not continue.

Psi is threatening to do just that. Back when it was clear that this was no cycle, that it was being hauled out of writers, I thought, "All right, let's go get smashers that nobody can top! Maybe *that* will bulldoze it out of the way so science fiction can go forward instead of being made to stand still!" Alfred Bester's *The Demolished Man* should have knocked down the wall. It did not. Neither did his *The Stars My Destination* nor others that ran in GALAXY, going far beyond mill-run psi pstories. And here it's still with us, shoving other themes aside.

Of course psi is a legitimate theme and I would run good examples of it with no more argument than any other. And of course I've had my share of psi experiences. Like what?

Well, back in World War II, there came the Battle of the Bulge and our CO gave us the "Men, this is it!" talk. As orientation man, I had to know the score and I, without minimizing the seriousness of the Bulge, said it was a hopeless military move. Our top sergeant, a lovable fellow named Moore, said, "Aw-right, wise guy, when is the war gonna end?" I felt a ghastly tension and out came the words: "April 30th." He demanded a bet and $2.50 was the best I could scrape up. The war ended in Europe May 8th. Moore collected, but he had to do some of his lovable barking not to get ganged up on because, at that distance, I had been only a week off.

We were heading for the Pacific in a Hog Islander built in 1917, too slow for a convoy, nothing but a terrier of a destroyer escort to protect us, and

(*Continued on page 193*)

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There had to be a way for Sub-Archivist Clarey to get up in

SENTRY OF THE SKY

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BY EVELYN E. SMITH

Illustrated by RITTER

the world — but this way was right out of the tri-di dramas.

CLAREY had checked in at Classification Center so many times that he came now more out of habit than hope. He didn't even look at the card that the test machine dropped into his hand until he was almost to the portway. And then he stopped. "Report to Room 33 for reclassification," it said.

Ten years before, Clarey would have been ecstatic, sure that reclassification could be only in one direction. The machine had not originally given him a job commensurate with his talents; why should it suddenly recognize them? He'd known of people who had been reclassified — always downward. I'm a perfectly competent Sub-Archivist, he told himself; I'll fight.

But he knew fighting wouldn't help. All he had was the right

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to refuse any job he could claim was not in his line; the government would then be obligated to continue his existence. There were many people who did subsist on the government dole: the aged and the deficient and the defective — and creative artists who refused to trammel their spirits and chose to be ranked as Unemployables. Clarey didn't fit into those categories.

Dispiritedly, he passed along innumerable winding corridors and up and down ramps that twisted and turned to lead into other ramps and corridors. That was the way all public buildings were designed. It was forbidden for the government to make any law-abiding individual think the way it wanted him to think. But it could move him in any direction it chose, and sometimes that served its purpose as well as the reorientation machines.

So the corridors he passed through were in constant eddying movement, with a variety of individuals bent on a variety of objectives. For the most part, they were of Low Echelon status, though occasionally an Upper Echelon flashed his peremptory way past. Even though most L-Es attempted to ape the U-E dress and manner, you could always tell the difference. You could tell the difference among the different levels of L-E, too — and there was no mistaking the Unemployables in their sober gray habits, devoid of ornament. It was, Clarey sometimes thought when guilt feelings bothered him, the most esthetic of costumes.

THE machine in Room 33 extracted whatever information it was set to receive, then spewed Clarey out and sent him on his way to Rooms 34, 35, and 36, where other machines repeated the same process. Room 37 proved to be that rare thing in the hierarchy of rooms — a destination. There was a human Employment Commissioner in it, splendidly garbed in crimson silvet and alexandrites — very Upper Echelon, indeed. He wore a gold mask, a common practice with celebrities who were afraid of being overwhelmed by their admirers, an even more common practice with U-E non-celebrities who enjoyed the thrill of distinguished anonymity.

Then Clarey stopped looking at the Commissioner. There was a girl sitting next to him, on a high-backed chair like his. Clarey had never seen a U-E girl so close before. Only the Greater Archivists had direct contact with the public, and Clarey wasn't likely to meet a U-E socially, even if he'd had a

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social life. The girl was too fabulous for him to think of her as a woman, a female; but he would have liked to have her in his archives, in the glass case with the rare editions.

"Good morning, Sub-Archivist Clarey," the man said mellowly. "Good of you to come in. There's rather an unusual position open and the machines tell us you're the one man who can fill it. Please sit down." He indicated a small, hard stool.

Clarey remained standing. "I've been a perfectly competent Sub-Archivist," he declared. "If MacFingal has — if there have been any complaints, I should have been told first."

"There have been no complaints. The reclassification is upward."

"You mean I've made it as a Musician!" Clarey cried, sinking to the hard little stool in joyful atony.

"Well, no, not exactly a Musician. But it's a highly artistic type of job with possible musical overtones."

Clarey became a hollow man once more. No matter what it was, if it wasn't as duly accredited Musician, it didn't matter. The machine could keep him from putting his symphonies down on tape, but it couldn't keep them from coursing in his head. That it could never take away from him. Or the resultant headache, either.

"What is the job, then?" he asked dully.

"A very important position, Sub-Archivist. In fact, the future welfare of this planet may depend on it."

"It's a trick to make me take a job nobody else wants," Clarey sneered. "And it must be a pretty rotten job for you to go to so much trouble."

The girl, whom he'd almost forgotten, gave a little laugh. Her eyes, he noticed, were hazel. There were L-E girls, he supposed, who also had hazel eyes —but a different hazel.

"PERHAPS this will convince you of the job's significance," the interviewer said huffily. He took off his mask and looked at Clarey with anticipation. He had a sleek, ordinary, middle-aged-to-elderly face.

There was an awkward interval. "Don't you recognize me?" he demanded.

Clarey shook his head. The girl laughed again.

"A blow to my ego, but proof that you're the right man for this job. I'm General Spano. And this is my Mistress, Secretary Han Vollard."

The girl inclined her head.

"At least you must know my name?" Spano said querulously.

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"I've heard it," Clarey admitted. "'The Fiend of Fomalhaut,' they call you," he went on before he could catch himself and stop the words.

The girl clapped her hand over her mouth, but the laughter spilled out over and around it, pretty U-E laughter.

Spano finally laughed, too. "It's a phrase that might be used about any military man. One carries out one's orders to the best of one's ability."

"Besides," Clarey observed in a non-Archivistic manner, "what concern have I with your military morality?"

"He's absolutely perfect for the job, Steff!" she cried. "I didn't think the machines were that good!"

"We mustn't underestimate the machines, Han," Spano said. "They're efficient, very efficient. Someday they'll take over from us."

"There're some things they'll never be able to do," she said. Her hazel eyes lingered on Clarey's. "Aren't you glad, Archivist?"

"Sub-Archivist," he corrected her frostily. "And I hadn't really thought about it."

"That's not what the machines say, Sub-Archivist," she told him, her voice candy-sweet. "They deep-probed your mind. You don't do anything, but you've thought about it a lot, haven't you?"

Clarey felt the blood surge up. "My thoughts are my own concern. You haven't the right to use them to taunt me."

"But I think you're attractive," she protested. "Honestly I do. In a different way. Just go to a good tailor, put on a little weight, dye your hair, and — "

"And I wouldn't be different any more," Clarey finished. That wasn't true; he would always be different. Not that he was deformed, just unappealing. He was below average height and his eyes and hair and skin were too light. In the past, he knew, there had been pale races and dark races on Earth. With the discovery of other intelligent life-forms to discriminate against together, the different races had fused into a swarthy unity. Of course he could hide his etiolation with dye and cosmetics, but those of really good quality cost more than he could afford, and cheap maquillage was worse than none. Besides, why should his appearance mean anything to anybody but himself? He'd had enough beating around the bush! "Would you mind telling me exactly what the job is?"

"Intelligence agent," said Spano.

"Isn't it exciting?" she put in. "Aren't you thrilled?"

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CLAREY bounced angrily from his chair. "I won't sit here and be ridiculed!"

"Why ridiculed?" Spano asked. "Don't you consider yourself an intelligent man?"

"Being an intelligence agent has nothing to do with intelligence!" Clarey said furiously. "The whole thing's silly, straight out of the tri-dis."

"What do you have against the tri-dis, Sub-Archivist?" Spano's voice was very quiet.

"Don't you like any of them?" the girl said. "I just adore *Sentries of the Sky!*" Her enthusiasm was tinged, obscurely, with warning.

"Well, I enjoy it, too," Clarey said, sinking back to the stool. "It's very entertaining, but I'm sure it isn't meant to be taken seriously."

"Oh, but it is, Sub-Archivist Clarey," Spano said. "*Sentries of the Sky* happens to be produced by my bureau. We want the public to know all about our operations — or as much as it's good for them to know — and they find it more palatable in fictionalized form."

"Documentaries always get low ratings," the girl said. "And you can't really blame the public — documentaries are dull. Myself, I like a love interest." Her eyes rested lingeringly on Clarey's.

They must think I'm a fool, Clarey thought; yet why would they bother to fool me? "But I am given to understand," he said to Spano, "even by the tri-dis, that an intelligence agent needs special training, special qualifications."

"In this case, the special qualifications outweigh the training. And you have the qualifications we need for Damorlan."

"According to the machines, all I'm qualified for is human filing cabinet. Is that what you want?"

Spano was growing impatient. "Look, Clarey, the machines have decided that you are not a Musician. Do you want to remain a Sub-Archivist for the rest of your days or will you take this other road? Once you're on a U-E level, you can fight the machines; tape your own music if you like."

Clarey said nothing, but his initial hostility was ebbing slowly away.

"I wanted to be a writer," Spano said. "The machines said no. So I became a soldier, rose to the top. Now — this is in strictest confidence — I write most of the episodes of *Sentries of the Sky* myself. There's always another route for the man with guts and vision, and, above all, faith. Why don't we continue the discussion over lunch?"

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IT was almost unthinkable for L-E and U-E to eat together. For Clarey this was an honor — too great an honor — and there was no way out of it. Spano and the girl put on their masks; the general touched a section of the wall and it slid back. There was a car waiting for them outside. It skimmed over the delicately wrought, immensely strong bridges that, together with the tunnels, linked the great glittering metropolis into a vast efficient whole.

Spano was not really broad-minded. Although they went to the *Aurora Borealis,* it was through a side door, and they were served in a private dining room. Clarey was glad and nettled at the same time.

The first few mouthfuls of the food tasted ambrosial; then it cloyed and Clarey had to force it down with a thin, almost astringent pale blue liquid. In itself, the liquor had only a mild, slightly pungent taste, but it made everything else increasingly delightful — the warm, luxurious little room, the perfume that wafted from the air-conditioning ducts, Han Vollard.

"Martian mountain wine," she warned him. "Rather overwhelming if you're not used to it, and sometimes even if you are . . ." Her eyes rested on the general.

"But there are no mountains on Mars," Clarey said, startled.

"That's it!" Spano chortled. "When you've drunk it, you see mountains!" And he filled his glass again.

While they ate, he told Clarey about Damorlan — its beautiful climate, light gravity, intelligent and civilized natives. Though the planet had been known for two decades, no one from Earth had ever been there except a few selected government officials, and, of course, the regular staff posted there.

"You mean it hasn't been colonized yet?" Clarey was relieved, because he felt he should, as an Archivist, have known more about the planet than its name and coordinates. "Why? It sounds like a splendid place for a colony."

"The natives," Spano said.

"There were natives on a lot of the planets we colonized. You disposed of them somehow."

"By co-existence in most cases, Sub-Archivist," Spano said drily. "We've found it best for Terrans and natives to live side by side in harmony. We dispose of a race only when it's necessary for the greatest good. And we would especially dislike having to dispose of the Damorlanti."

"What's wrong with them?" Clarey asked, pushing away his half-finished crême brulée a la Betelgeuse with a sigh. "Are they

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excessively belligerent, then?"

"No more belligerent than any intelligent life-form which has pulled itself up by its bootstraps."

"Rigid?" Clarey suggested. "Unadaptable? Intolerant? Indolent? Personally offensive?"

SPANO smiled. He leaned back with half-shut eyes, as if this were a guessing game. "None of those."

"Then why consider disposing of them?" Clarey asked. "They sound pretty decent for natives. Don't wipe them out; even an ilf has a right to live."

"Clarey," the girl said, "you're drunk."

"I'm in full command of my faculties," he assured her. "My wits are all about me, moving me to ask how you could possibly expect to use a secret agent on Damorlan if there are no colonists. What would he disguise himself as — a touring Earth official?" He laughed with modest triumph.

Spano smiled. "He could disguise himself as one of them. They're humanoid."

"*That* humanoid?"

"That humanoid. So there you have the problem in a nutshell."

But Clarey still couldn't see that there was a problem. "I thought we — the human race, that is — were supposed to be the very apotheosis of life species."

"So we are. And that's the impression we've conveyed to such other intelligent life-forms as we've taken under our aegis. What we're afraid of is that the other ilfs might become . . . confused when they see the Damorlanti, think they're the ruling race." Leaning forward, he pounded so loudly on the table both the others jumped. "This is our galaxy and we don't intend that anyone, humanoid or otherwise, is going to forget it!"

"You're drunk, too, Steff," the girl said. She had changed completely; her coquetry had dropped as if it were another mask. And it had been, Clarey thought — an advertising mask. An offer had been made, and, if he accepted it, he would get probably not Han herself but a reasonable facsimile.

He tried to sort things out in his whizzing brain. "But why should the other ilfs ever see a Damorlant?" he asked, enunciating very precisely. "I've never seen another life-form to speak of. I thought the others weren't allowed off-planet — except the Baluts, and there's no mistaking them, is there?" For the Baluts, although charming, were unmistakably non-human, being purplish, amiable, and octopoid.

"We don't forbid the ilfs to go

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off-planet," Spano proclaimed. "That would be tyrannical. We simply don't allow them passage in our spaceships. Since they don't have any of their own, they can't leave."

"Then you're afraid the Damorlanti will develop space travel on their own," Clarey cried. "Superior race — seeking after knowledge — spread their wings and soar to the stars." He flapped his arms and fell off the stool.

"Really, Steff," Han said, motioning for the servo-mechanism to pick Clarey up, "this is no way to conduct an interview."

"I am a creative artist," the general said thickly. "I believe in suiting the interview to the occasion. Clarey understands, for he, too, is an artist." The general sneezed and rubbed his nose with his silver sleeve. "Listen to me, boy. The Damorlanti are a fine, creative, productive race. It isn't generally known, but they developed the op fastener for evening wear, two of the new scents on the roster come from Damorlan, and the snettis is an adaptation of a Damorlant original. Would you want a species as artistic as that to be annihilated by an epidemic?"

"Do our germs work on them?" Clarey wanted to know.

"That hasn't been established yet. But their germs certainly work on us." The general sneezed again. "That's where I got this sinus trouble, last voyage to Damorlan. But you'll be inoculated, of course. Now we know what to watch out for, so you'll be perfectly safe. That is, as far as disease is concerned."

HIS FACE assumed a stern, noble aspect. "Naturally, if you're discovered as a spy, we'll have to repudiate you. You must know that from the tri-dis."

"But I haven't said I would go!" Clarey howled. "And I can't see why you'd want *me*, anyway!"

"Modest," the general said, lighting a smoke-stick. "An admirable trait in a young intelligence operative — or, indeed, anyone. Have a smoke-stick?"

Clarey hesitated. He had never tried one; he had always wanted to.

"Don't, Clarey," the girl advised. "You'll be sick."

She spoke with authority and reason. Clarey shook his head.

The general inhaled and exhaled a cloud of smoke in the shape of a bunnit. "The Damorlanti look like us, but because they look like us, that doesn't mean they think like us. They may not have the least idea of developing space travel, simply be interested in developing thought, art, ideals, splendid cultural things like that. We don't know enough about them;

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we may be making mountains out of molehills."

"Martian molehills," Clarey snickered.

"Precisely," the general agreed. "Except that there are no moles on Mars either."

"But I still can't understand. Why *me?*"

The general leaned forward and said in a confidential tone, "We want to understand the true Damorlan. Our observations have been too superficial; couldn't help being. There we come, blasting out of the skies with the devil of a noise, running all over the planet as if we owned it. You know how those skyboys throw their gravity around."

Clarey nodded. *Sentries of the Sky* had kept him well informed on such matters.

"So what we want is a man who can go to Damorlan for five or ten years and become a Damorlant in everything but basic loyalties. A man who will absorb the very spirit of the culture, but in terms our machines can understand and interpret." Spano stood erect. "You, Clarey, are that man!"

The girl applauded. "Well done, Steff! You finally got it right side up!"

"But I've lived twenty-eight years on this planet and I'm not a part of its culture," Clarey protested. "I'm a lonely, friendless man — you must know that if you've deep-probed me — so why should I put up a front and be brave and proud about it?"

THEN HE gave a short, bitter laugh. "I see. That's the reason you want me. I have no roots, no ties; I belong nowhere. Nobody loves me. Who else, you think, but a man like me would spend ten years on an alien planet as an alien?"

"A patriot, Sub-Archivist," the general said sternly. "By God, sir, a patriot!"

"There's nothing I'd like better than to see Terra and all its colonies go up in smoke. Mind you," Clarey added quickly, for he was not as drunk as all that, "I've nothing against the government. It's a purely personal grievance."

The general unsteadily patted his arm. "You're detached, m'boy. You can examine an alien planet objectively, without trying to project your own cultural identity upon it, because you have no cultural identity."

"How about physical identity?" Clarey asked. "They can't be ex-exactly like us. Against the laws of nature."

"The laws of man are higher than the laws of nature," the general said, waving his arm. A gout of smoke curled around his head and became a halo. "Very

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slight matter of plastic surgery. And we'll change you back as soon as you return." Then he sat down heavily. "How many young men in your position get an opportunity like this? Permanent U-E status, a hundred thousand credits a year and, of course, on Damorlan you'd be on an expense account; our money's no good there. By the time you got back, there'd be about a million and a half waiting for you, with interest. You could buy all the instruments and tape all the music you wanted. And, if the Musicians' Guild puts up a fuss, you could buy it, too. Don't let anybody kid you about the wheel, son; money was mankind's first significant invention."

"But ten years. That's a long time away from home."

"Home is where the heart is, and you wanting to see your own planet go up in a puff of smoke — why, even an ilf wouldn't say a thing like that!" Spano shook his head. "That's too detached for me to understand. You'll find the years will pass quickly on Damorlan. You'll have stimulating work to do; every moment will be a challenge. When it's all over, you'll be only thirty-eight — the very prime of life. You won't have aged even that much, because you'll be entitled to longevity treatments at regular intervals.

"So think it over, m'boy." He rose waveringly and clapped Clarey on the shoulder. "And take the rest of the afternoon off; I'll fix it with Archives. We wouldn't want you coming back from Classification intoxicated." He winked. "Make a very bad impression on your co-workers."

Han masked herself and escorted Clarey to the restaurant portway. "Don't believe everything he says. But I think you'd better accept the offer."

"I don't have to," Clarey said.

"No," she agreed, "you don't. But you'd better."

CLAREY TOOK the cheap underground route home. His antiseptic little two-room apartment seemed even bleaker than usual. He dialed a dyspep pill from the auto-spensor; the lunch was beginning to tell on him. And that evening he couldn't even take an interest in *Sentries of the Sky,* which, though he'd never have admitted it, was his favorite program. He had no friends; nobody would miss him if he left Earth or died or anything. The general's right, he thought; I might as well be an alien on an alien planet. At least I'll be paid better. And he wondered whether, in lighter gravity, his spirits might not get a lift.

He dragged himself to work the next day. He found someone

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did care after all. "Well, Sub-Archivist Clarey," Chief Section Archivist MacFingal snarled, "I would have expected to see more sparkle in your eye, more pep in your step, after a whole day of nothing but sweet rest."

"But — but General Spano said it would be all right if I didn't report back in the afternoon."

"Oh, it is all right, Sub-Archivist, no question of that. How could I dare to complain about a man who has such powerful friends? I suppose if I gave you the Sagittarius files to reorganize, you'd go running to your friend General Spano, sniveling about cruel and unfair treatment."

So Clarey started reorganizing the Sagittarius files — a sickeningly dull task which should by rights have gone to a junior archivist. All morning he couldn't help thinking about Damorlan — its invigorating atmosphere, its pleasant climate, its presumed absence of archives and archivists. During his lunchstop he looked up the planet in the files. There was only a small part of a tape on it. There might be more in the Classified Files. It was, of course, forbidden to view secretapes without a direct order from the Chief Archivist, but the tapes were locked by the same code as the rare editions. After all, he told himself, I have a legitimate need for the information.

So he punched for Damorlan in the secret files. He put the tape in the viewer. He saw the natives. Cold shock filled him, and then hot fury. They were humanoid all right — pallid, pale-haired creatures. Objective viewpoint, he thought furiously; detachment be damned! I was picked *because I look like one of them!*

He was wrenched away from the viewer. "Sub-Archivist Clarey, what is the meaning of this?" Chief Section Archivist MacFingal demanded. "You know what taking a secretape out without permission means?"

Clarey knew. The reorientation machine. "Ask General Spano," he said in a constricted voice. "He'll tell you it's all right."

GENERAL Spano said that it was, indeed, all right. "I'm so glad to hear you've decided to join us. Splendid career for an enterprising young man. Smokestick?"

Clarey refused; he no longer had any interest in trying one.

"Don't look so grim," Spano said jovially. "You'll like the Damorlanti once you get to know them. Very affectionate people. Haven't had any major wars for several generations. Cur-

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rently there are just a few skirmishes at the poles and you ought to be able to keep away from those easily. And they'll simply love you."

"But I don't like anyone," Clarey said. "And I don't see why the Damorlanti should like me," he added fairly.

"I'll tell you why! Because it'll be your job to *make* them like you. You've got to be friendly and outgoing if it kills you. Anyone can develop a winning personality if he sets his mind to it. I though you said you watched the tri-dis!"

"I — I don't always watch the commercials," Clarey admitted.

"Oh, well, we all have our little failings." Spano leaned forward, his voice now pitched to persuasive decibels. "Normally, of course, you wouldn't stoop to hypocrisy to gain friends, and quite right, too — people should accept you as you are or they wouldn't be worthy of becoming your friends. But this is different. You have to be what they want, because you want something from them. You'll have to suffer rebuffs and humiliations and never show resentment."

"In other words," Clarey said, "a secret agent is supposed to forget all about such concepts as self-respect."

"If necessary, yes. But here self-respect doesn't enter into it. These aren't people and they don't really matter. You wouldn't be humiliated, would you, if you tried to pat a dog and it snarled at you?"

"Steff, he's got to think of them as people until he's definitely given them a clean bill of health," Han Vollard protested. "Otherwise, the whole thing won't work."

"Well," the general temporized, "think of them as people, then, but as inferior people. Let them snoop and pry and sneer. Always, at the back of your mind, you'll have the knowledge that this is all a sham, that someday they'll get whatever it is they deserve. You might even think of it as a game, Clarey — no more personal than when you fail to get the gardip ball into the loop."

"I don't happen to play gardip, General," Clarey reminded him coldly. Gardip was strictly a U-E pastime. And, in any case, Clarey was not a gamesman.

He was put through intensive indoctrination, given accelerated courses in the total secret agent curriculum: Self-Defense and Electronics, Decoding and Resourcefulness, Xenopsychology and Acting.

"There are eight cardinal rules of acting," the robocoach told him. "The first is: Never Identify. You'll never be able to become the character you're playing, be-

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cause you aren't that character — the playwright gave birth to him, not your mother. Therefore — "

"But I'm only going to play one role," Clarey broke in. "All I need to know is how to play that role well and convincingly. My life may depend on it."

"I teach acting," the robo-coach said loftily. "I don't run a charm school. If you come to me, you learn — or, at least, are exposed to — all I have to offer. I refuse to tailor my art to any occasional need. Now, the second cardinal rule . . . "

CLAREY was glad he could absorb the languages and social structure of the planet through the impersonal hypnotapes. He had to learn more than one language because the planet was divided into several national units, each speaking a different tongue. Inefficient as far as planetary operation went, but advantageous to him, Han Vollard pointed out, because, though he'd work in Vangtor, he would be supposed to have originated in Ventimor; hence his accent.

"Work?" Clarey asked. "I thought I was going to be an undercover agent."

"You'll have a cover job," she explained wearily. "You can't just wander around with no visible source of income, unless you're a member of the nobility, and it would be risky to elevate you to the peerage."

"What kind of a job will I have?" Clarey asked, brightening a little at the idea of possibly having something interesting to do.

"They call it *librarian*. I'm not exactly sure what it is, but Colonel Blynn — he's our chief officer on the planet — says that after indoctrination you ought to be able to handle it."

Clarey already knew that jobs on Damorlan weren't officially assigned, but that employer and employee somehow managed to find each other and work out arrangements themselves. Sometimes, Han now explained, employers would advertise for employees. Colonel Blynn had answered such a job in Vangtor on his behalf from an accommodation address in Ventimor. "You were hired sight unseen, because you came cheap. So they probably won't check your references. Let's hope not, anyway."

THE TRIP to Damorlan was one long aching agony. Since luxury liners naturally didn't touch on Damorlan, he was sent out on a service freighter, built for maximum stowage rather than comfort. Most of the time he was spacesick. The only thing that comforted him was that it

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would be ten years before he'd have to go back.

They landed on the Earthmen's spaceport — the only spaceport, of course — at Barshwat, and he was hustled off to Earth Headquarters in an animal-drawn cart that made him realize there were other ailments besides spacesickness.

"Afraid you're going to have to hole up in my suite while you're with us," Colonel Blynn apologized when Clarey was safely inside. "The rest of the establishment is crawling with native servants — daytimes, anyway; they sleep out — but they have orders never to come near my quarters."

He looked interestedly at Clarey. "Amazing how the plastosurgeons got you to look exactly like a native. Those boys really know their stuff. Maybe I *will* have my nose fixed next time I go Earthside."

Clarey glared venomously at the tall, handsome, dark young officer.

"Don't worry," Blynn soothed him. "I'm sure when you go back they'll be able to make you look exactly the way you were before."

He gave Clarey a general briefing and explained to him that the additional allowance he'd be receiving — since he couldn't be expected to live on a Damorlant salary — would come from an alleged rich aunt in Barshwat.

"Where'll you get the native currency?" Clarey asked.

"We do some restricted trading with the natives, bring materials that're in short supply; salt, breakfast cereals, pigments, thread — stuff like that. Nothing strategic, nothing they could possibly use against us . . . unless they decide to strangle us with our own string." He guffawed earsplittingly.

ONE RAINY evening a couple of Earth officers hustled Clarey into a hax-cart. A little later, equipped with a native kit, an itinerary, and a ticket purchased in Ventimor, he was left a short distance from a large track-car station.

He was so numb with fright he had to force himself to move in the right direction leg by leg. He gained a little confidence when he was able to find the terminus without needing to ask directions; he even managed to find the right chain of cars and a place to sit in one of them. He didn't realize that this was something of an achievement until he discovered that certain later arrivals had to stand. He wondered why more tickets were issued than there were seats available, then realized the answer was simple — primitives

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couldn't count very accurately.

Creakily and slowly, the chain got under way. Clarey's terror mounted. Here he was, wearing strange clothes, on a strange world, surrounded by strange creatures. They aren't really repulsive, he told himself; they look like people; they look like me.

Some of the natives seemed to be staring at him. His heart began to beat loudly. Could they hear it? Did their hearts beat the same way? Was their hearing more acute than his? The tapes

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had seemed so full of information; now he saw how full of holes they'd been. Then he noticed that the natives were staring at each other. His heart quieted. Only a local custom. After a while, little conversational groups formed. No one spoke to him, for he spoke to no one. He was not yet ready to thrust himself upon them; he had enough to do to reach his destination successfully.

He tried to follow the conversations for practice and to keep his mind off his fears. The male next to him was talking to the male opposite about the weather and its effect on the sirtles. The three females on his other side were telling each other how their respective offspring were doing in school. Some voices he couldn't identify with owners were complaining how much sagor and titulwirt cost these days. I don't know why the government is so worried, he thought; they're not really very human at all.

The chain had been scheduled to reach the end of its run in three hours. It took closer to five. He got off at what would have been around midnight on Earth, and the terminus where he was supposed to take the next chain was almost empty of people, completely empty of cars. Although it was still a few minutes before his car was due, he was worried. Finally, he approached a native.

"Is this — is this not where the 39:12 to Zrig is destined to appear?" he asked, conscious as he uttered Vangtort aloud for the first time that his phrasing was not entirely colloquial.

The native stared at him with small pale eyes and bit his middle finger. "Stranger, eh?" he asked in a small pale voice.

"Yes." The native waited. "I come from Ventimor," Clarey told him. Nosy native, he thought furiously; prying primitive.

"You don't hafta shout," the native said. "I'm not deef."

Clarey realized what he hadn't noted consciously before — the natives spoke much more softly than Earthmen. Local custom two.

"You'll be finding things a lot different here in Vangtor," the native told him. "Livelier, more up to date. F'rinstance, do the cars always run on time in Ventimor?"

"Yes," Clarey said firmly.

"Well, they don't here. Know why? That's because we've got more'n one chain of 'em." He made a noise like a wounded turshi. He was laughing.

CLAREY smiled until his gums ached. "About the 39:12? It is rather important to me, as

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I understand the next chain does not leave for several days."

The native lifted a chronometer hanging around his neck. "Ought to get in around 40 or so," he said. "Whyn't you get yourself a female or a bite to eat?" He waved his hand toward the two trade booths that were still open for business.

Clarey was very hungry. But, as he got near the food booth, the stench and the sight of the utensils were too much for him. He went back to the carways and sat huddled on a banquette until his chain came in at 40:91.

The car he picked was empty, so he stretched out on the seat and slept until it got to Zrig, very early in the morning. When he got out, day was dawning and a food booth hadn't had time to accumulate odors so he climbed to one of the perches and pointed to something that looked like a lopsided pie and something else that looked like coffee. Neither was what it appeared to be, but the pseudo-pie was edible and the pseudo-coffee was good. Somehow, the food seemed to diminish his fright; it made the world less strange.

"Where you going, stranger?" the native asked, resting his arms on the top of the booth.

"Katund," Clarey said. The other looked puzzled. "It is a village near Zrig."

"That a fact?" The native bit his little finger. "You look like a city feller to me."

"That is correct," Clarey said patiently. "I come from Qytet. It is a place of some size." He waited a decent interval before collapsing his smile.

"Now, why would a smart-looking young fellow like you want to go to a place like this Katund, eh?"

Clarey started to shrug, then remembered that was not a Damorlant gesture. "I have received employment there."

"I should think you'd be able to do better'n that." The native nibbled at his thumb. "What did you say you worked at?"

"I didn't. I am a librarian."

The native turned away and began to rinse his utensils. "In that case, I guess Katund's as good a place as any."

Surely, Clarey thought, even a Damorlant would at this point rise up and smite the food merchant with one of his own platters. Then he forgot his anger in apprehension. What in the name of whatever gods they worshipped on this planet could a librarian possibly be?

He got up and was about to go. Then he remembered to be friendly and outgoing. "I have never tasted better food," he told the native. "Not even in Barshwat."

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The native picked up the coin Clarey had left by way of tip and bit it. Apparently it passed the test. "Stop here next time you're passing this way," he advised, "and I'll really serve you something to write home about!"

THE OMNIBUS for Katund proved to be nothing but a large cart drawn by a team of hax. Clarey waited for internal manifestations as he rode. None came. I've found my land legs, he thought, or, rather, my land stomach. And with the hax jogging along the quiet lanes of Vangtor, he found himself almost at peace.

Earth was completely urbanized: there were the great metropolises; there were the parks; there were the oceans. That was all. So to him the Vangtort countryside looked like a huge park, with grass and trees and flowers that were slightly unrealistic in color, but beautiful just the same — even more, perhaps. It was idyllic. There's bound to be some catch, he thought.

The other passengers, who'd been talking together in low tones, turned toward Clarey. "You'll be the new librarian, I take it?" the tallest observed. He was a bulky creature, wearing a rich but sober cloak that came down to his ankles.

For a moment Clarey couldn't understand him; the local dialect seemed to thicken the words. "Why, yes. How did you know that?"

The native wiggled his ears. "Not many folks come to Katund and a new librarian's expected, so it wasn't hard to figure. Except you don't look my idea of a librarian."

Clarey nervously smoothed the dark red cloak that covered him from shoulder to mid-calf. Was it too loud? Too quiet? Too short?

"What give you the idea of comin' to Katund?" the oldest and smallest of the three asked in a whistling voice. "It's no place anybody who wasn't born here'd choose."

"Most young fellers favor the city," the third—a barrel-shaped individual—agreed. "I'd of gone there myself when I was a lad, if Dad hadn't needed somebody to take over the Purple Furbush when he was gone."

"Maybe he's runnin' away," the ancient sibilated. "When I was a boy, there was a feller from the city came here; turned out to be a thief." All three stared at Clarey.

"I — I replied to an advertisement in the Dordolec District Bulletin," he said carefully. "I wished for a position that was peaceful and quiet. I am recovering from an overset of the nervous system."

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The oldest one said, "That'd account for it right enough."

Clarey gritted his teeth and beamed at them.

"Typical idiot smile," the ancient whispered. "Noticed it myself right off, but I didn't like to say."

"Is it right to have a librarian that isn't all there?" the proprietor of the Furbush asked. "Foreigner, too. I mean to say — the young ones use him more'n most."

"We've got to take what we can get," the biggest native said. "Katund's funds are running mighty low."

"What can you expect when you ballot yourself a salary raise every year?" the old one whistled. The other two made animal noises. Clarey must not jump; he must learn to laugh like a turshi if he hoped to be the life of any Damorlant party.

THE BIG ONE stood up as well as he could in the swaying cart. "Guess I'd better interduce myself," he said, holding out a sturdily shod foot. "I'm Malesor, headman of Katund. This is Piq; he deals in blots and snarls. And Hanxi here's the innkeeper."

"My name is Balt," Clarey said. "I am honored by this meeting." And he went through the conventional toe-touching with each one.

"Guess you'll be putting up with me until you've found permanent quarters, Til Balt," Hanxi said. "Not that you could do much better than make your permanent home at the Purple Furbush. You'll find life more comfortable than if you lodge with a private fam'ly. Bein' a young unmarried man — " he twisted his nose suggestively — "you'd naturally want a bit of freedom, excitement."

"Remember he's a librarian," Piq whistled. "He might not appreciate as good a time as most young fellers."

Clarey was glad when a cluster of domes appearing over the horizon indicated that they'd reached Katund. He looked about him curiously. The countryside he'd been able to equate with a park, but this small aggregate of detached dwellings bore no relationship to anything in his experience.

His kit was dexterously removed from his hand. "Guess you'll want to check in first," Hanxi said, "so I'll just take your gear over to the inn for you."

He pointed out a small dome shading from lavender at the bottom to rose pink on top. Over the door were glittering symbols which Clarey was able to decipher after a moment's concentration as "Dordonec District Public Library — Katund

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Branch," and underneath, in smaller letters, "Please Blow Nose Before Entering."

Hesitantly, he touched the screen that covered the portway. It rolled back. He went inside.

At his first sight of what filled the shelves from floor to topmost curve of the dome, Clarey became charged with fury. The ancient books in the glass cases back on Earth were of a different shape and substance, but, "My God," he cried aloud, "it's nothing but another archive!"

The female in charge glared at him. "Silence, please!"

Suddenly the anger left him, and the fear. He was no longer a stranger on a strange world. He was an archivist in an archive.

She took a better look at him and the local equivalent of a bright smile shone on her face. "May I help you, til?" she asked in a softer, sweeter voice.

"I am Balt, tial," he said. "I am the new librarian."

She came out from behind the desk to offer the ceremonial toe touch. "I'm Embelsira, the head librarian, and I am very glad to see you!" Her tone was warm; she really seemed to mean it. "Everything's in such a mess," she went on. "I've needed help so very badly, so very long." She looked up at him, for she was a good deal shorter than he. "So glad," she murmured, "so very, very glad to see you, really."

"Well, now you have help," he said with quiet strength. "Where are the files?"

They were written instead of punched, of alien design, in an alien language, arranged according to alien patterns, but he understood them at a glance. "These will need to be reorganized from top to bottom," he said.

"Yes, Til Balt," she said demurely. "Whatever you say."

ONCE EVERY six months, Clarey went for a long weekend to visit his "Aunt Askidush" in Barshwat. Barshwat was the largest city on Darmorlan; it was the capital of Vintnor — the greatest nation. Earthmen, Clarey thought, as he traveled there in the comparative luxury of a first-class compartment — as a rich nephew, he saw no real reason to travel third-class — were disgustingly obvious.

That first time, he was five hours late, and Blynn was a nervous wreck. "I was afraid you'd been killed or discovered or God knows," he babbled, practically embracing Clarey in a fervency of relief. "I was afraid — "

"Come, come, Colonel," Clarey interrupted, striding past him, "you know how inefficient Damorlant transport is, and I had to

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make two chain connections."

"Of course," the colonel said, wiping the perspiration off his forehead. "Of course. And you must be dead tired. Sit down; let me take your cloak — "

"How about the servants?" Clarey asked.

"This is their weekend off." Blynn pulled himself together. "Really, my dear fellow, I've been in this business longer than you. I know what precautions to take."

"Never can be too careful."

"I see you've got yourself another cloak," the colonel said as he hung it in the guest snap. "Very handsome. I've never seen one like it."

"Yes. As a matter of fact, several people on the chains wanted to know where I'd got it"

"Where *did* you get it?" asked Blynn, feeling the material. "Might go well as an export."

"Afraid it couldn't be exported. It's a custom job, you see. Hand-woven, hand-decorated. It was a birthday present."

The colonel stared at him.

"Well," Clarey said, "if you didn't expect me to get birthday presents, you shouldn't have put a birth date on my identity papers. My boss baked me a melxhane — "

"Your boss!"

"The relationship between employer and employee is much different from the way it is on Earth," Clarey explained. Reaching over, he flipped the switch on the recorder and repeated the statement, adding, "Embelsira is kind, considerate, helpful; she can't do enough for me." He put his mouth close to the mechanism. "Be sure to tell MacFingal that."

"Now, now," the colonel said, turning the switch off. He pushed a small tea wagon over to Clarey. "You must be starving. Have some sandwiches and coffee. I'm sure you'll be glad to taste good Earth food again."

"Yes, indeed," Clarey said, trying not to make a face. "Er — shouldn't we start recording while everything's fresh in my mind?"

"Might as well," the colonel said, flipping the switch again. "Pity we don't have a probe here. Would save so much time. But, of course, it's an expensive installation. All right, Clarey, over to you."

CLAREY choked on a mouthful of sandwich and hesitated. "Begin with your very first impressions," the colonel urged.

"Well, the archives — the library — was in a real mess. Took me over two weeks to get it in even roughly decent shape. Three different systems of classification and, added to that — "

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"Not so much the library, old chap. Leave the technical stuff for later. What I meant was your first impressions of the natives . . . Is something wrong with the coffee? And you've hardly touched your sandwich. Maybe you'd like another kind. I have several varieties here — ham and cheese and — "

"Oh, no," Clarey protested. "The one I have is fine. It's just that I'm — well, to tell you the truth," he confessed, "I've grown accustomed to Damorlant food."

"Don't see how you could," the colonel said. "Nauseating stuff — to my way of thinking," he added politely. He opened a sandwich and inspected the filling.

"You've only eaten at public places. Even the better restaurants don't put themselves out for Earthmen, say they have no — palates, I guess the word would be. But you ought to taste my landlady's cooking!"

"All this is being taped, you know. They'll have to listen to every word on Earth."

"If only I could convey the true picture through words. Her ragouts are rhapsodies, her soufflés symphonies — I'm using rough Terrestrial equivalents, of course — "

"The cuisine comes later, please. Over-all impressions first."

"Well," Clarey began again, "at first I was a bit surprised that you'd stuck me in a quarter-credit place like Katund. Naturally in a village the people'd be more backward than in the cities, so you'd have a poorer idea of how they were developing. Then I realized that you couldn't help putting me there, that you probably couldn't write a letter good enough to get me a job in any of the big centers. Embelsira said she was surprised to find me so much more literate than she would have expected from the letter."

The colonel sat erect huffily. "I've never pretended to be a philologist. And, anyway, Damorlan isn't like Earth. Here the heartbeat of the planet is in its villages."

"Earth hasn't any villages, so the comparison doesn't apply." Clarey cleared his throat. "Don't you have anything to drink except coffee?"

"Tea?"

"That would be better. Do you know the Katundi have a special variety of tea, or something very like it, which is — "

"Tell me what they think of Earthmen," the colonel interrupted desperately.

"Not much. What I mean is, nobody in Katund's actually had any contact with them, though they've heard of them, of course. Every now and then there's a little article in the Dordonec Bul-

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letin from their Barshwat correspondent, and sometimes, if there isn't any real news, he gives a couple of inches to the Earthmen."

"Exactly how do they regard us?" the colonel asked as he spooned tea into the pot. "Demigods? Superior beings? Are they in great awe of us?"

"They regard us as visitors from another planet," Clarey said. "They don't realize from quite how far away we hail, think it's only a matter of a solar system or two, but they've got the general idea. Don't forget, they may not be a mechanical people, but they do have some idea of astronomy. They're not illiterate clods."

"What do they think of our spaceships? Great silver birds, something like that?"

SIGHING deeply, Clarey said, "They think our spaceships are cars that fly through the sky without tracks. And they think it's silly, our having machines to fly in the sky and none to go on the ground. There's an old Dordonec proverb: 'One must run before one must fly.' Originally applied to birds, but — "

"But what else do they think about us?"

Clarey was hurt. "That's what I was getting to, if you'll only give me time. After all, I've been speaking Vangtort for six months and it's a little hard to go back to Terran and organize my thoughts at the same time."

"Terribly sorry," the colonel apologized, handing him a cup of tea. "Carry on."

"Thank you. They say if you — if we — are so smart, why do we use hax or the chains like anybody else? They think somebody else must have given us the starships, or else we stole them. That's mostly Piq's idea; he's the village lawyer and, of course, lawyers are apt to think in terms like that."

"Um," the colonel said. "We didn't think it would be a good idea to introduce ground cars. Upset their traffic and cause dissatisfied yearnings."

"They're satisfied with their hax carts. They're not in any hurry to get anywhere. But Katund's a village. Attitudes may be different in the cities."

"You stick with your village, old chap. If you feel a wild urge for city life, you can always take a weekend trip to Zrig. Stay at the Zrig Grasht; it's the only decent inn. By the way, you spoke of a landlady. Do you mean at the inn?"

No, Clarey told him, at first he had put up at the inn, but he found the place noisy, the cooking poor, and the pallet covers dirty. Besides, Hanxi had kept

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importuning him to go on visits to a nearby township where he promised him a good time.

"I was wondering, though," Clarey finished, "if it would be possible for an Earthman and a Damarlent to — er — have a good time together."

"Been wondering myself!" the colonel said eagerly. "I didn't dare ask on my own behalf, but it's your job, isn't it? I'll check back with the X-T boys on Earth. Go on with your story."

AS A RESIDENT of the inn, Clarey told Colonel Blynn, he'd found that he was expected to join the men in the bar parlor every evening, where they'd drink and exchange appropriate stories. But he'd choked on the squfur and was insufficiently familiar with the local mores to be able to appreciate the stories, let alone tell any. He'd concentrated on smiling and agreeing with whatever anybody said, with the result that the others began to agree with Piq that he was a bit cracked. "They were, for the most part, polite enough to me, but I could sense the gulf. I was a stranger, a city man, and probably a bit of a lunatic."

A few of the younger ones hadn't even been polite. "They used to insult me obliquely," Clarey went on, "and whisper things I only half-heard. I pretended I didn't hear at all. I stood them drinks and told them what a lovely place Katund was, so much cleaner and prettier and friendlier than the city. That just seemed to confirm their impression that I was an idiot."

He stopped, took a sip of tea, and continued, "The females were friendly enough, though. Every time they came into the library they'd always stop for a chat. And they were very hospitable — invited me to outdoor luncheons, temple gatherings, things like that. Embelsira — she's the chief librarian — got quite annoyed because she said they made so much noise when they all gathered round my desk."

He paused and blushed. "I have an idea that — well, the ladies don't find me unattractive. I mean they're not really ladies. That is, they're perfect ladies; they're just not women."

"I'm not a bit surprised," the colonel nodded sagely. "Very well-set-up young fellow for a native — only natural they should take a liking to you. And only natural the men shouldn't."

Clarey gave an embarrassed grin. "One evening I was sitting in the bar-parlor, talking to Kuqal and Gazmor, two of the older men. And then Mundes came in; he's the town muscle boy. You know the type — one

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in every tri-di series. He was rather unpleasant. I pretended to think he was joking. I've learned to laugh like one of them. Listen." He gave a creditable imitation of an agonized turshi.

THE colonel shuddered. "I'm sure if anything would convince the chaps back on Earth that the Damorlanti aren't human, that would do it. What then?"

"Finally he made a remark impugning the virility of librarians that I simply could not ignore, so I emptied my mug of squfur in his face."

"Stout fellow!"

"I knew he'd attack me and probably beat me up, but I thought that perhaps if I put up a show of courage they'd respect me. There was something like that in *Sentries of the Sky* a year or so ago — but of course you'd have missed that episode; you were up here. Anyhow, as I expected, he hit me. And then I hit him . . . " He smiled reminiscently into his cup of tea.

"And then?"

"I beat him," Clarey said simply. "I still can't figure out how I did it. I think it must be because my muscles are heavier-gravity type." He smiled again. "And I beat him good. He couldn't dance at the temple for weeks."

The colonel's jaw dropped. "He's a temple dancer?"

"Chief temple dancer. I was a little worried about that, because I didn't want to get in bad theologically. So I went to the priest and apologized for any inconvenience I might have caused. He said not to worry; Mundes had had it coming to him for a long time and his one regret was that he hadn't been there to see it. Then we touched toes and he said he liked to see a young fellow with brawn who also took an interest in cultural pursuits like reading. He trusted I'd have a beneficial effect on the youth of the village. And then he asked me to fill in for Mundes as chief temple dancer until he — ah — recovered. It's a great honor, you know!" he said sharply, as the colonel seemed more moved to mirth than awe. "But I've never been much of a dancing man and that's what I told him."

"Very well done," the colonel said approvingly. "But you still haven't explained where you got lodgings and a landlady."

"She's Embelsira's mother. I was invited over for dinner from time to time . . . It's a local custom," he explained as Blynn's eyebrows went up. "So, when Embelsira told me her mother happened to have a compartment to let with meals included,

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I jumped at it. Blynn, you really ought to taste those pastries of hers!"

The colonel managed to divert him onto some of the other aspects of Katundut life. When he'd finished taping everything he had to say, the colonel gave him a list of artifacts and small-sized flora and fauna the specialists on Earth wanted him to collect for his next trip, providing he could do so without arousing attention or violating tabus.

They shook hands. "Clarey," the colonel said, "you've done splendidly. Earth will be proud of you. And you might bring along one or two of those pastries, by the way."

WHEN Clarey got back to Katund, Embelsira and her mother gave a little welcome home party for him. "Nothing elaborate," the widow said. "Just a few neighbors and friends, some simple refreshments."

The tiny residential dome was packed with people; the refreshments, Clarey thought, as he munched industriously, were

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magnificent. But then he'd been forced to live on Earth food for a weekend, so he was no judge.

After they'd finished eating, the young people folded the furniture, and, while one of the boys played upon a curious instrument that was string and percussion and brass all at once, the others danced.

Clarey made no attempt to participate. In his early youth, he'd flopped at the Earth hops — and the Damorlanti had a distinctly more Dionysian culture than his home world. He stood and watched them leaping and twirling. When they'd dropped, temporarily exhausted, he made his way over to the musician, whom he recognized as one of Piq's numerous grandsons; this one was Rini, he thought.

"Is that difficult to learn?" he asked, touching the instrument.

"The ulerin is extremely difficult," the boy said importantly. "It takes years and years of practice. And you've got to have the touch to begin with. Not many do. All our family have the touch, my brother Irik most of

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all. He's in Barshwat, studying to be a famous musician."

Clarey looked at the ulerin with unmistakable wistfulness.

"Care to try it?" the boy asked. "But, mind, you have to pay for any bladders you burst."

"I shall be very careful," Clarey said, taking the instrument reverently in his hands. He had never touched a musical instrument before — an Earth instrument would have been no less unfamiliar, no more wonderful. Gently he began to pluck, and bang and blow, in imitation of the way the boy had done, and, though the sounds that came out didn't have the same smoothness, still they didn't fall harshly on his ears. The others stopped talking and listened; it would have been difficult for them to do otherwise, as he was unable to find the muting device.

"Sounds like the death wail of a hix," Piq sibilated, but he added grudgingly, "Foreigner or not, I have to say this for him — he's got the touch."

"Yes, he's got the touch," others agreed. "You always can tell."

Rini smiled at Clarey. "I believe you do. I'll teach you to play, if you like."

"I would, very much." Clarey was about to offer to pay for the lessons; then he remembered that, though this would have been the right thing on Earth, it would be wrong on Damorlan. "If it is not too much trouble," he finished.

"It's the kind of trouble I like." The boy twisted his nose at Clarey. "Sometime you can hide the reserved books for me."

AFTER the guests had gone, Clarey insisted on helping the women with the putting away. "Well, as long as Embelsira has a pair of brawny arms to help her," the widow yawned, "I might as well be getting along to my pallet. I seem to get more and more tired these days — old age, I expect. One day I'll be so tired I'll never wake up and Embelsira'll be alone and what'll she do, poor thing? Who can live on a librarian's salary? Now, on two librarians' salaries — "

"Mother," Embelsira interrupted furiously, "you go to bed!"

She did, hurriedly.

"Don't worry, Embelsira," Clarey said. "She will be weaving away for decades yet. Everybody says she's the best weaver in the district," he added, to change the subject.

"Yes," Embelsira said as they gathered all the oddments the guests had left, "she's been offered a lot of money to go work in Zrig. But she won't leave Katund; she was born here, and so were her parents."

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"I do not blame her for wanting to stay," he said. "It's a very — homelike place."

She sighed. "To us it is, but I don't suppose someone who's city born and bred would feel the same way. I know you won't let yourself stay buried here forever, and what will I — what will Mother and I ever do without you?"

"It is — very kind of you to say so," he replied. "I am honored."

The girl — she was still young enough to be called a girl, though no longer in her first youth — looked up at him. Blue eyes could be pleasing in their way. "Why are you always so stiff, so cold?"

"I am not cold," he said honestly. "I am — afraid."

"There is nothing to be afraid of. You're safe, among friends, no matter what you may have done back where you came from."

"But I have done nothing back there," he said. "Nothing at all. Perhaps that is the trouble with me."

She looked up at him and then away. "Then isn't it about time you started to do something?"

THE NEXT time he went to Barshwat he took a lot of luggage with him, because, besides the artifacts and the flora and fauna, he brought cold pastries for the colonel. The colonel ate one in silence, then said, "Try to get the recipe."

"By the way," said Clarey, "the X-T boys made a few mistakes. The bugg isn't an insect; it's a bird. And the lule isn't a bird; it's a flower. And the paparun isn't a flower; it's an insect."

"Oh, well, I guess they'll be able to straighten that out," the colonel said, licking crumbs from his thick fingers. "We do our jobs and they do theirs." He reached for another pastry.

"Take good care of the bugg," Clarey said. "He likes his morning seed mixed with milk; his evening seed with wine. His name is Mirti. He's very tame and affectionate. I — said I was bringing him to my aunt . . . " He paused. "You *are* going to take him back alive, aren't you? You'd get so much more information that way."

"Wouldn't dream of hurting a hair — a feather — no, it is a hair, isn't it? — of the little fellow's head."

Clarey looked out of the window at the purple night sky. Then he turned back to the colonel. "I've been taking music lessons," he said defiantly.

"Fine! Every man should have a hobby!"

"But I've no music license."

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"Come now, Clarey. You still don't seem to realize you're on Damorlan, not Earth. Not a blooded intelligence man yet! There aren't any guilds on Damorlan, so enjoy yourself."

"Speaking of that, did you find out about — er — Earthmen and — "

"Yes, I'd meant to drop you a note, but it seemed rather odd information for your aunt to be giving you. It's absolutely all right, old chap. Go ahead, have your bit of fun."

Clarey was unreasonably annoyed. "I wasn't thinking of what you're thinking. I mean — well, Katund is a village and the native morality is very strict in these matters."

"Afraid I don't quite follow you."

Clarey bit his finger. "Well," he finally admitted, "the truth of the matter is I'd like to get married."

The colonel was extremely surprised. "A legal arrangement! Is it absolutely necessary? How about the females that the innkeeper's so anxious to have you — ah — meet?"

CLAREY didn't know how to explain. "Their standards of cleanliness . . . " he began, and stopped. Then he started again: "I suppose I'd like a permanent companion."

"I don't suppose there's any real reason why you shouldn't enter into a legal liaison while you're here," said the colonel. "After all, it isn't as if the two races could interbreed. That could be decidedly awkward. Who's the lucky little lady?"

"My landlady's daughter," Clarey said.

"Your boss, eh? Flying high, aren't you, old chap?" His massive hand descended on Clarey's shoulder. Then he grew serious. "Can she cook like her mother?"

"Even better."

"My boy," the colonel said solemnly, "you have my unqualified blessing. And when I ask you to save me a piece of the wedding cake, I ask from the heart."

So, when Clarey went back to Katund, he asked Embelsira to marry him and she accepted. The whole village turned out for the wedding. Clarey managed to take some vocpix of the ceremonies for the X-Ts with a finger unit. I ought to get a handsome wedding present for this, he thought.

And, to his surprise, on the wedding day, an elaborate jewel-studded toilet service did arrive from Barshwat — with the affectionate regards of his aunt, who was too ill to travel. They tie up everything, he thought, but he knew it was a little more than simply remembering to pick up a loose end. The toilet set was

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vulgar, ostentatious, hideous — obviously selected with loving care and Terrestrial taste.

Everybody in Katund and a lot of people from the surrounding country came to look at it. It seemed to establish his eligibility beyond a doubt. "Never thought 'Belsira'd do it, and at her age, too," Piq was heard to comment. "But it looks like she really got herself a catch. What's a little weakness in the dome-top when there's money, too?"

THE FIRST three years of Clarey's marriage were happy ones. He and Embelsira got on very nicely together and, since he was fond of her mother, he didn't mind her constant presence too much. Once a week he took a ulerin lesson from Rini. He practiced assiduously and made progress that he himself could see was sensational. He did wish that Rini would accept money; it would have been so much less of a nuisance than replacing the music books the boy stole from the library, but he couldn't expect local customs to coincide with his own. The money, of course, didn't matter; he still wasn't living up to his allowance, although he was beginning to spread himself on elaborate custom-made cloaks and tunics. On Earth he had dressed soberly, according to his status, but here he felt entitled to cut a dash.

At the colonel's request, on his next trip to Barshwat he brought his ulerin and taped some native melodies. "I like 'em," the colonel said, nodding his head emphatically. "Catchy, very catchy. Hope the X-Ts appreciate them; they don't usually like music if it sounds at all human." And, catching the look on Clarey's face, "Well, you know what I mean. To them, if a tune can be hummed, it isn't authentic."

News of Clarey's skill on the ulerin spread through the countryside. When he played in the temple concerts, people sometimes came from as far away as Zrig to hear him. Clarey was a little disturbed about this, because he didn't subscribe to the local faith. But the high priest said, "My son, music knows no religious boundaries. Besides, when you play, we always get three times as much in the collection nets."

At the time Clarey got word from Barshwat that General Spano and the staff ship were expected shortly, he had risen to the post of chief librarian. Embelsira had retired to keep dome and wait for the young ones who would, of course, never come. Clarey had hired a hixhead of an assistant from Zrig to assist him;

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he saw now why the village had originally been grateful to get even a foreigner of doubtful background for the job.

"I'm going to have to stay at least a week with Aunt Askush this time," he told his wife. "Legal matters. I think she's drawing up a will or some such," he added, hoping that this would keep Embelsira happy and convinced.

Maybe it worked too well. "But why can't I come with you? I've always wanted so much to meet her."

"I keep telling you her illness is a disfiguring one; she won't meet strangers. And don't say you're not a stranger — you'd understand, but she's the one who wouldn't. Please don't nag me, Belsir."

"Sometimes I think you're a stranger, Balt," Embelsira declared emotionally.

"Yes, dear, I'm a stranger, anything you say, but let me get packed." He started folding a robe crookedly, hoping it would distract her into taking over the job.

But she leaned against the lintel, staring at him. "Balt, sometimes I wonder if you really have an aunt."

The only thing he allowed himself to do was put down the robe he was holding. "Do you think I send expensive toilet sets to myself? You must think Piq's right — I'm just plain crazy."

"Piq doesn't think you're crazy any more. He and the other old ones say you have a woman in Barshwat. But I don't believe that!"

"Maybe I do, Embelsira. A man's a man, even if he is a librarian."

"I know it isn't true. I think it's . . . something else entirely. You're so strange sometimes, Balt. How could somebody who comes only from the other side of the same world be so strange?"

HE forced a grin. "Suddenly you've become very cosmic. What do you know of our — of the world? It's a big place. And nobody else in Katund seems to be so impressed by my strangeness; they think a foreigner's entitled to his queer ways."

"Nobody in Katund knows you as well as I do. And I've seen foreigners before. They're not different in the way you are." She looked intently at him. "It's not a shameful kind of strangeness, just a . . . strange kind of strangeness. Fascinating in its way — I don't want you to think I just married the first stranger who came along . . . "

"I'm sure you had many offers, dear. Come, help me fold this cloak or I'll never make the bus."

"You know what I'm reminded of?" she said, coming forward

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and taking the cloak. "Of the old tale about the lovely village maiden who marries the handsome stranger and promises she'll never look into his eyes. And then one day she forgets and looks into his eyes and sees — "

"What does she see?"

"The worst thing of all, the greatest horror. She sees nothing. She sees emptiness."

He laughed. "The moral's clear. She shouldn't have looked into his eyes."

"But how can you help looking into the eyes of the man you love? Maybe that's the moral — that it was an impossible task he set her."

"In those tales it's always the man's fault, isn't it? Not much doubt who made them up. Now, Belsir, please, I've got to finish packing. It'll be just my luck to have today be the day the bus to Zrig's on time."

"A couple of weeks ago I was in Zrig shopping and I saw an Earthman," she said, folding his cloak into the kit. "The way he walked, the way he moved, reminded me a little of you."

It was a long moment before he could speak. "Do I look to you like a dark-faced, dark-haired, brown-eyed — "

"I didn't *say* you were an Earthman! But if Earthmen can travel through the sky, they might be able to do other things, too; maybe even change the way a man looks."

He snapped the kit-fastener. "If you really believe that, you should be careful. Creatures as clever as that might be able to pluck your words from my brain."

"What if they did? I'm not ashamed. Or afraid, either."

He reached out and patted her arm. Maybe she wasn't afraid, but he was. For her. And for the people of Damorlan. If there was a deep-probe on the staff ship . . . If only something could happen to him, so he could never reach Barshwat . . . Spano wouldn't know. He might guess, but he wouldn't know. He'd have to start all over again — and maybe things would turn out better next time.

GENERAL SPANO and his secretary were waiting in Blynn's office. Clarey stretched out his foot in greeting, then recollected himself and reached out his hand. "You see, sir," he said with a too-hearty laugh, "I'm really living my part."

Spano beamed. "Damorlan certainly seems to agree with you, my boy. You look positively blooming. Doesn't he, Han?"

She nodded grave agreement.

The general sniffed. "What's that you two are smoking?"

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"Marac leaves," Clarey said. "A native product. Care to try one?" He extended his pouch to Spano.

"Don't mind if I do," the general said, taking a roll. "Which part do you light? And why don't you offer one to Secretary Vollard?"

"Oh, sorry; I didn't think of it. The women here don't use it. Care to try one, Secretary?" As she took a roll, she looked at him searchingly. She was still beautiful in an Amazonian way, but he preferred Embelsira's way. He could never imagine Han Vollard warm and tender.

"Well, Clarey," Spano said, "you seem to be doing a splendid job. I've been absolutely enthralled by your reports." He settled himself behind Blynn's desk. "Pity the information's top secret. It could make a fortune on the tri-dis."

Clarey bowed.

"And those musictapes you sent back created quite a stir. We've brought along some superior equipment. The rig here is good enough for routine work, but we need better fidelity for this. And it would be appreciated if the colonel didn't beat time with his foot while you played — no offense, Blynn."

He turned back to Clarey. "Do you think you can pick up some of those what-do-you-call-'ems — ulerins — for us, too, or is there a tabu of some kind?"

"Not ulerins," Clarey corrected, "uleran. And you can walk up to any marketplace and get as many as you like — providing you have the cash, of course."

"I *told* you the job had musical overtones. I'll bet that makes up for some of the discomforts and privations."

"It's not too uncomfortable."

"There speaks a true patriot!" Spano approved.

Han measured Clarey with her eyes. "You're quiet, Secretary," he said nervously. "You used to talk a lot more."

Blynn stared at him. She smiled. "You're the one who has things to tell now, Clarey."

"And show," the general said, almost licking his lips. "Every one of your tapes made my mouth fairly water. I trust you brought an ample and varied supply of those delicacies."

Clarey's smile was unforced this time. "I got your message and I brought along a large hamperful, but it'll be hard to make the people back home keep thinking my aunt's an invalid if she eats like a team of hax. My wife baked some pastries, which I especially recommend to your attention."

"I think we ought to get business over before we start on

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refreshments," Han suggested.

"Yes," Spano agreed reluctantly. "I suppose you had better be deep-probed first, Clarey . . . Not even one taste beforehand, Han? . . . Well, I suppose not."

Clarey tensed. "You've got a probe on the ship?" he asked, as if the possibility had never occurred to him.

"That's right," Han Vollard said. "It's an up-to-date model. The whole thing'll take you less than an hour, and we'll have the information collated by morning."

"I — I would prefer not to be deep-probed. You never can tell: it might upset all the conditioning I've received here; it — "

"Let us worry about that, Clarey," she said.

HE DIDN'T sleep that night. He sat looking out of the window, knowing there was nothing he could do. Embelsira was in danger — her people were in danger — and he couldn't lift a finger to save them.

When he came down to breakfast, he saw that the reports had been collated and read. "So your wife suspects, does she?" the general asked. "Shrewd little creature. You must have picked one of the more intelligent ones."

Clarey struggled on the pin. "Wives often have strange fancies about their husbands. You mustn't take it too seriously."

"How often have you been married, Clarey?" Han asked. "Or even linked in liaison? How many married people did you know well back on Earth?"

There was no need to answer; she knew all the answers.

"I think Clarey did a rattling good job," Blynn said stoutly. "It wasn't his fault that she suspects."

"Of course not!" the general agreed. "Feminine intuition isn't restricted to human females. In fact, in some female ilfs it's even stronger than in humans. The precognitive faculties in the grua, for example — "

"What are you going to do?" Clarey interrupted bluntly.

Han Vollard answered him: "Nothing yet. You've got us a lot of information, but it's not enough. You'll have to keep on as you are for another three years or so."

It was all Clarey could do to keep from trembling visibly with relief.

"It doesn't even matter too much that one of the natives suspects," Han went on, "as long as she doesn't definitely know."

"She doesn't," Clarey said, "and she won't. And she won't tell anybody; she'd be afraid for me." But he wasn't all that sure. The Damorlanti didn't hate Earthmen and they didn't fear

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them, and so Embelsira wouldn't think it was a shameful thing to be. He was glad he'd already been deep-probed. At least this thought would be safe for three years or so.

"At any rate, they don't seem antagonistic toward Earthmen," the general said, almost as if he'd read part of Clarey's mind. "I think that's nice."

Han Vollard looked at him. "It's not their attitude toward us that matters. They couldn't do anything if they tried. It's what they are that matters, what they will be that matters even more."

"I take back what I said before!" Clarey flared. "You talk too damn much!"

There was a chilling silence.

"Nerves," said Blynn nervously. "Every agent lets go when he's back among his own kind. Nothing but release of tension."

SEVERAL days later the staff ship was ready to go back to Earth. "Don't forget to tell your wife how much I enjoyed the pies," Spano said; then, "Oh, I was forgetting; you could hardly do that. But do see if you can work out something with the dehydro-freeze. I'd hate to have to wait three years before tasting them again. You can keep your marac rolls, though; I'll take my smoke-sticks."

"Try not to get any more involved, Clarey," Han Vollard said as they stood outside the airlock. "Maybe you ought to move on — to a city, perhaps, another country — "

"When I want your advice, I'll ask for it!" he snapped.

After they'd gone, Blynn turned on him. "Man, you must be out of your mind, talking to Secretary Vollard like that."

"Why does she have to keep meddling? It's none of her business—"

"None of her business! Secretary of the Space Service, and you say it's none of her business?"

Clarey blinked. "I thought she *was* Spano's secretary."

Blynn laughed until the tears dampened his dark cheeks. "Spano's only Head of Intelligence. She's his Mistress."

"Of course — *mistress*, feminine of *master!* I should have realized that before." Then Clarey laughed, too. "I'm a real all-round alien. I can't even understand my own language."

On the way back home he couldn't help thinking that Han Vollard might be right. It could be the best thing for him to disappear now; the best thing for himself, the best thing for Embelsira. He could pretend to desert her — better yet, Blynn could fake some kind of accident, so her feelings wouldn't be hurt.

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A pension of some kind would be arranged. She could marry again, have the children she wanted so much. If he waited the full ten years, she might never be able to have them. He had no idea at what age Damorlant females ceased to be fertile.

But she wasn't just a Damorlant female — she was his wife. He didn't want to leave her. Maybe he never would have to. Hadn't Spano said that when his term was over he could pick his planet? He would pick Damorlan.

WHEN Clarey came home from Barshwat, Embelsira said nothing more about her suspicions, but greeted him affectionately and prepared a special supper for him. Afterward, he wondered if making love to an Earth girl could be as pleasant. He wondered how it would be to make love to Han Vollard.

The days passed and he forgot about Han Vollard. After much persuasion, he agreed to give a series of concerts at Zrig, but only on condition that Rini played with him and had one solo each performance. He was embarrassed at having so far outstripped his teacher, but Rini seemed unperturbed.

"My technique's still better than yours will ever be," he said. "It's this new style of yours that gets 'em. I understand it's spreading; it's reached as far as Barshwat. You should see the angry letters Irik writes about it!" Rini chuckled. "And he hasn't the least idea it started right here in his own home village that he's always sneered at for being so backward!"

Clarey smiled and clapped the boy on the neck. If it made Rini feel better to think Clarey had a new style rather than that Clarey played better than he did, Clarey had no objection.

Clarey was offered the post of head librarian at Zrig, but Embelsira didn't want to leave Katund, and, when he thought about it, he really didn't want to either. So he refused the job and didn't bother mentioning the matter to Headquarters.

As he grew more sure of himself and his position, he allowed his wealth to show. He and Embelsira moved into a larger dome. Instead of sending to Zrig or even Barshwat for the furnishings, they hired local talent. Tavan, the carpenter, made them some exquisite blackwood pieces inlaid with opalescent stone that everyone said was the equal of anything in Barshwat. A talented nephew of Hanxi's painted glowing murals; Embelsira's mother wove rugs and draperies in muted water-tones. The dome became the district showplace.

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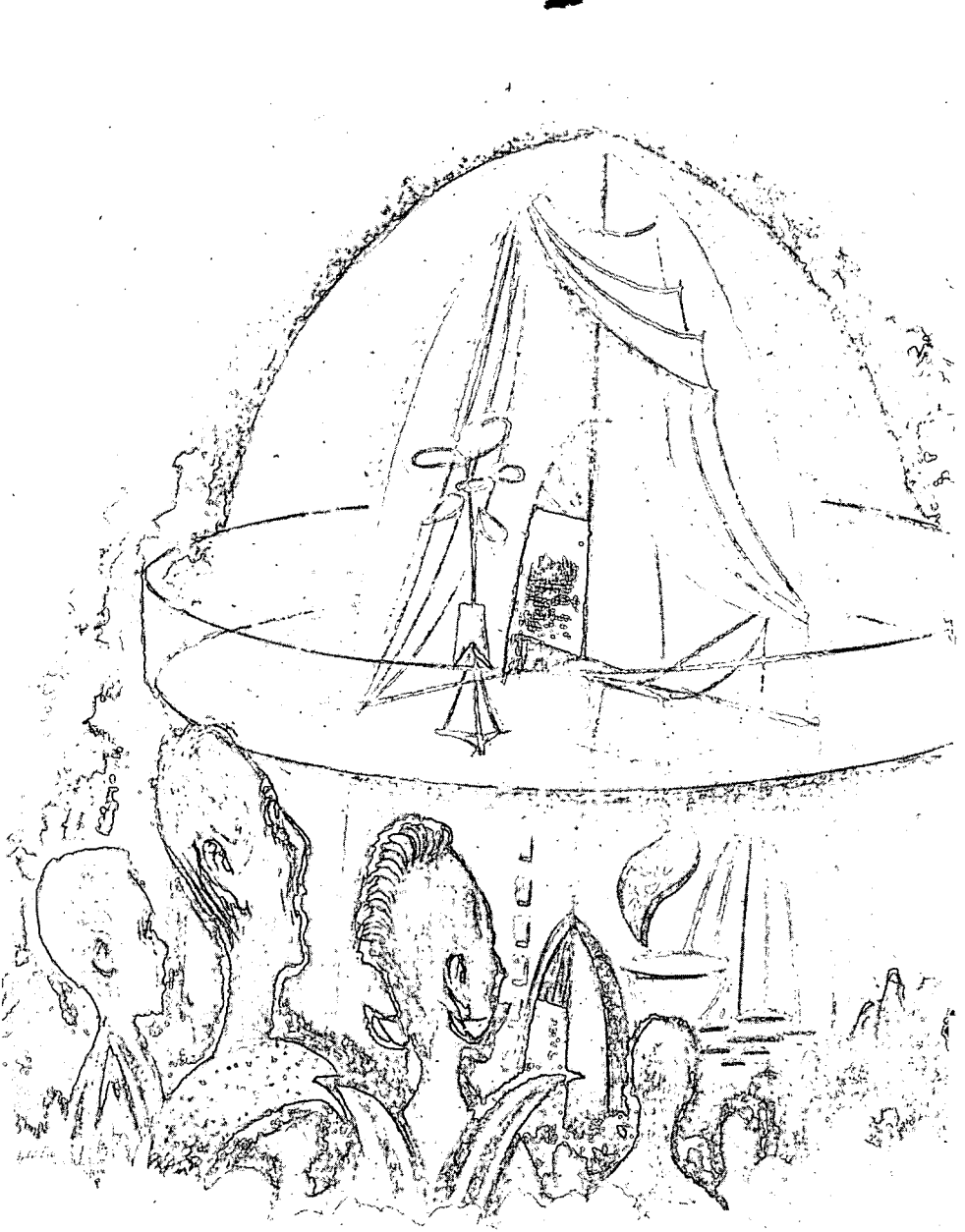

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Clarey realized he now had a position to keep up, but sometimes it annoyed him when perfect strangers asked to see the place.

He was invited to run against Malesor as headman but declined. He didn't want to be brought into undue prominence. Trouble was, as he became popular, he also aroused animosity. There were the girls who felt he should have married them instead of Embelsira, and their mothers and subsequent husbands. A lot of people resented Clarey because they felt he should have decorated his house differently, dressed differently, spent his money differently.

A man can live ignored by everyone, he discovered, but he can't be liked by some without finding himself disliked by others.

MATTERS came to a head in his fourth spring there. He thought of it as spring, although on Damorlan the seasons had no separate identities; they blended into one another, without its ever being very hot or very cold, very rainy or very dry. The reason he called this time of the year spring was that it seemed closest to perfection.

It was less perfect that year. Because it was then that Rini's brother Irik came back from Barshwat, after a six years' absence. He was very much the city man, far more so than anyone Clarey had seen in Barshwat itself. His tunics were shorter than his fellow villagers', and his cloaks iridesced restlessly from one vivid color to another. He wore a great deal of jewelry and perfume, neither of the best quality, and the toes of his boots were divided.

Clarey described this in detail to Embelsira the night Irik put in his first appearance at the Furbush. "You should have seen the little horror!"

"That's the way city men dress," Embelsira told him. "It's fashionable."

"But, dear, I've been to Barshwat."

"You don't have an eye for clothes. You never notice when I put on anything new. And I think it's unfair to take a dislike to Irik just because you don't care for the way he dresses."

"It's more than that, Belsira." And yet how could he explain to her what he couldn't quite understand himself, that Irik was vain, stupid, hostile; hence, dangerous?

"I swear to you, Balt," Embelsira said demurely, "that whatever there was between me and Irik, it all ended six years ago."

Clarey gave a start and then held back a smile. "I believe you, dear." And he kissed her nose.

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IRIK held forth in the Furbush every evening of his stay in Katund. He had grievances and he aired them generously. He hated everything — the government, taxes, modern music, and Earthmen, whom he seemed to consider in some way responsible for the modern music, or at least its popularization. "Barbarians — slept completely through my concerts."

"But people are always falling asleep during concerts, Irik," Malesor pointed out reasonably. "And how could you expect barbarians to appreciate good music? What do you care for Earthmen's opinions as long as your own people like your music?"

Irik hesitated. "But the Earthmen have taken up the new kind of music; they stay awake during that. And — a lot of people seem to think that whatever's strange is good, so whatever the Earthmen like eventually becomes fashionable."

Hanxi wiggled his ears. "Fashions change. Well, who's ready to have his mug refilled?"

"But the Earthmen will keep on setting the fashions," Irik snarled. "Many people think the Earthmen know everything, just because they're aloof and have sky cars."

"Well," Malesor said, "the sky cars certainly prove they know something we don't. Better stick to your music, boy."

The smoky little bar-parlor resounded with laughter and Irik's face turned a nasty red. "They don't know anything about music and they don't know everything about machinery. We might surprise them yet. A friend of mine knows Guhak, the fellow who invented that new brake for the track car a few years ago."

"We know about that brake," Piq observed. "It stops a car so good, the chains are twice as late nowadays as they used to be, and you couldn't strictly say they were ever on time."

Everybody laughed again. Irik quivered with anger. "Guhak has invented a car that doesn't need to go on tracks. It can run *whenever* it wants *wherever* it wants. And one car will be able to go faster than three hax teams."

"That I'll believe when I've ridden on it," Kuqal grinned. "Even the chains aren't that fast." The others bit their thumbs and nodded — except Clarey, who was rigidly keeping out of the conversation. He forced squfur down his tightening throat and said nothing.

"You're backward clods!" Irik raged. "If the Earthmen can have cars that go through the sky without tracks why shouldn't we have cars that run on the ground the same way? Have we tried?"

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"Doesn't seem to me it's worth the effort," Malesor said. "Our cars can get us where we're going as fast as we need to go already, why bother?"

"Whatever an Earthman can do, we can do better! Soon Guhak will get his ground cars on the road. After that, it'll only be a short step to cars that go in the sky. Then we'll find out where the Earthmen come from and why they're here. We'll be as powerful as they are. We'll get rid of them and their rotten music."

The bar parlor was silent, except for the clink as Clarey put his mug on the table. If he held it an instant longer, he was afraid he would spill it. One or two of the men looked at him uneasily out of the corners of their eyes. Malesor spoke: "In the first place, you don't know how powerful Earthmen are. In the second place, who wants to be powerful, anyway? The Earthmen haven't done us any harm and they're a good thing for the economy. My cousin in Zrig tells me one of 'em come into his store a coupla months ago and bought out his whole stock, every bolt of cloth. Paid twice what it was worth, too. Live and let live, I say."

The others murmured restlessly.

"If there are ways of doing things better," Rini suggested, "why shouldn't we have them, t..?" His eyes darted quickly toward Clarey's and then as quickly away.

Irik turned his head and looked directly at Clarey for the first time. "You're silent, stranger. What do *you* think of the Earthmen?"

CLAREY picked up his drink, finished the squfur and set the mug back down on the table. "I don't know much about Earthmen. An ugly-looking lot, true, but there doesn't seem to be any harm in them. Of course, living in Barshwat, you probably know a lot more about them than I do."

"I doubt that," Irik said. "You have an aunt in Barshwat."

Clarey allowed himself to look surprised before he said courteously, "I'm glad you find me and my family so interesting. Yes, it so happens I do have an aunt there, but she's rather advanced in years and doesn't enjoy hanging around the starship field the way the children do."

Irik's face darkened. "What is your aunt's name?"

This time everyone looked surprised. The question itself was not too out-of-the-way, but his tone decidedly was.

"She's a great-grandmother," Clarey said. "She would be too old for you. And I assure you it's difficult to part her from her money. I've tried."

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Everybody laughed. Irik was furious. "I understand that your aunt lives very close to Earth Headquarters!"

Somebody must have followed him on one or more of his trips to Barshwat, Clarey realized. "If the Earthmen chose to establish themselves in the best residential section of Barshwat, then probably my aunt does live near them. She's not the type to leave a comfortable dome simply because foreigners move into the neighborhood."

"Perhaps she has more than neighborhood in common with Earthmen."

The room was suddenly very quiet again.

"She does sometimes go to sleep at concerts," Clarey conceded.

Irik opened his mouth. Malesor held up a hand. "Before you say anything more against the Earthmen, Irik," he advised, "you oughta find out more about them. Their cars move faster and higher than ours. Maybe their catapults do, too."

No one looked at Clarey. Malesor had averted a showdown, he knew, but this was the beginning of the end. And he had a suspicion who was responsible—innocently perhaps, perhaps not. Love does not always imply trust. And when he told Embelsira what had happened in the Furbush, she, too, couldn't meet his eye. "That Irik," she said, "I never liked him."

"I wonder how he knows so much about me."

"Rini writes him very often," she babbled. "He must have told him you were responsible for the new music. That would make him hate you. Rini likes to irritate Irik, because he's always been jealous of him. But the whole thing's silly. How could you possibly make over the world's music, even if you were — " Her voice ran down.

"An Earthman?" he finished coldly. "I suppose you went around telling everybody your suspicions, and Rini wrote that to Irik, too?"

"I DIDN'T tell anybody!" she protested indignantly. "Not a soul!" She met his eye. "Except Mother, of course."

"Your mother! You might as well have published it in the District Bulletin!"

"You have no right to speak of Mother like that, even if it's true!" Embelsira began to sob. "I had to tell her, Balt — she kept asking why there weren't any young ones."

"You could've told her to mind her own business!" he snapped, before he could catch himself. Five years, and he still made slips. It *was* her business. On

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Damorlan, it was a woman's duty not only to have children but to see that her children had children and their children had children.

He made himself look grave and self-reproachful. "I have a confession to make, Belsir. I should have told you when I married you. I can't have children."

"I never heard of such a thing! Everybody has children — unless they're not married, of course," she added primly.

"It's an affliction sent by the gods."

"The gods would never do anything like that!" she declared confidently.

How primitive she is, he thought, and, then, angrily, how provincial I am! He had never stopped to think about it, but he knew of no married couple who had not at least one offspring; he and Embelsira were the only ones. It hadn't occurred to the X-T specialists that a species whose biological assets were roughly the same might have different handicaps. Apparently there was no such thing as sterility on Damorlan.

"Are you really an Earthman, then, Balt?" she asked timidly.

She had spread the news around, ruined him, ruined the work Earth had been doing, perhaps ruined even more than that — and she hadn't even been sure to begin with. But it was too late for recriminations. He had to salvage what little he could — time, maybe; that was all.

"Are you going to tell?" he asked.

She hesitated. "Do you swear you don't mean my people any harm?"

"I swear," he said.

"Then I swear not to tell," she said.

He kissed her. After all, he thought, it isn't a lie. *I* don't mean her people any harm. Besides, sooner or later, her mother will get it out of her, so she won't be keeping her part of the bargain.

THE NEXT time he went to Barshwat he knew he would be followed. He tried to shake the follower or followers off, but he couldn't be sure he'd succeeded.

He found the colonel looking out of the window with an expression of quiet melancholy. If there had been any Earthwomen on Damorlan, Clarey would have thought he'd been crossed in love.

"Things are taking a bad turn, Clarey," Blynn said. "There have been certain manifestations of hostility from the natives. Get any hint of it?"

"No," Clarey said, taking his usual chair, "not a whisper."

The colonel sat down heavily.

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"Katund's too out of the way. We should've moved you to a city once you'd got the feel of things. But you do go to Zrig occasionally. Haven't you heard anything there?"

"Only that an Earthman bought out a cloth merchant's entire stock at one blow."

Blynn grinned weakly. "Maybe it was rather an ostentatious thing to do, but the fabric's beautiful stuff."

He rubbed his nose reflectively. "Fact is, I've been hearing disturbing rumors. They say some fellow named Kuhak's invented a ground car that can run without tracks."

Clarey almost said "Guhak," but caught himself in time. "Nonsense," he scoffed. "The more I know of them, the more surprised I am they ever got as far as inventing the chains."

"But they did, no getting around that. This is what Earth's afraid of, you know," he reminded Clarey — unnecessarily. "This is why you were sent here. And, if the rumor's true, it looks as if you weren't needed at all. I got the bad news by myself."

"But why should it be that upsetting?" Clarey tried to laugh. "You look as if it were the end of the world."

The colonel gave him a long, level look. "I consider that remark in the worst of taste."

Clarey stopped laughing.

"Remember," the colonel reminded Clarey, again unnecessarily, "this is the way we ourselves got started."

"But the Damorlanti don't have to move in the same direction. They may look human and even act human, but they don't think human."

The colonel clasped his hands behind his head and sighed. "There have been articles against us in the paper, and whenever we go out in the street people — natives, I mean — make nasty remarks and sometimes even faces at us. And what have we done to them? Carefully minded our own business, avoided all cultural contacts except for trade purposes, paid them much more than the going price for their goods, and gave them one or two tips on health and sanitation. As a result, they're beginning to hate us."

"But if you send a report, it'll bring the staff ship in ahead of time. Maybe the whole thing'll blow over. This way, you're not giving it a chance to."

The colonel chewed his lip. "Well," he finally said, "I might as well wait and see if the rumor's verified before I report it."

CLAREY went back to Katund. The months went by. The friendly atmosphere in the Fur-

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bush had vanished, and not as many people stopped and chatted when they came to the library. But there wasn't any actual incident until the evening Clarey was walking home after late night at the library and a stone struck him between the shoulder-blades. "Dirty Earthman!" a voice called, and several pairs of feet scuttled off.

He didn't mention the incident to Embelsira, not wanting to worry her, but the next morning he went to the Village Dome and informed Malesor. "Very bad," the headman muttered. "*Very* bad. Whoever did it will be punished."

"You won't be able to catch them," Clarey said, "and there'd be no point in punishment, anyway. Look at it like this, Mal. Suppose I had been an Earthman, don't you see how dangerous this would be, not for me but for you? Can't you imagine the inevitable results?"

Malesor nodded. "The Earthmen's catapults *do* go farther and faster, then?"

"And maybe deeper," Clarey agreed, pretending not to notice that it had been a question. "After the way Irik talked, I couldn't help drifting over to the starfield when I was in Barshwat and watching an Earth ship come. You've no idea how incredibly powerful a thing it was. Anyone who has power in one direction is likely to have it in another."

"I wonder if the Earthmen always had power," Malesor mused, "if they weren't like us once. If, given time, we couldn't be like them . . . "

Clarey didn't say anything.

Malesor's pale face turned gray "You mean we might not be given time?"

Clarey wiggled his ears. "Who can tell what's in the mind of an Earthman?"

Malesor looked directly at him. "Why do you tell me this?"

"Because I'm one of you," Clarey said stoutly.

Malesor shook his head. "You're not. You never can be. But thanks for the warning — stranger."

Never identify, the robocoach had said. *You'll never be able to become the character you're trying to play*. He was talking only of the stage, Clarey told himself angrily, as he left the Dome.

Reports trickled in from the cities. Earthmen had been stoned twice in Zrig, more often than that in Barshwat. Clarey got an agitated letter from his aunt. "Watch out for yourself, Nephew," she warned. "They may take it into their heads to attack all foreigners. Remember, come what may, you'll always have a home with me."

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Then everything broke open. A group of natives attacked Earth Headquarters in Barshwat. The Earthmen sprayed them with a gas which made the attackers lose consciousness without harming them; that is, it was intended to work that way. However, one of them hit his head on the wall when he fell, and he died the next day.

The people of Vintnor were aroused. They milled angrily around Earth Headquarters carrying banners that said, "Go home, Earth murderers!" The headman of Barshwat called upon Colonel Blynn. The colonel courteously refused to withdraw his men from the planet. "I'm under orders, old chap," he said, "but I'll report your request back to Earth."

"It isn't a request," the headman said.

Colonel Blynn smiled and said, "We'll treat it as one, shall we?"

Clarey knew what happened, because the headman gave a report of the conversation to the Barshwat Prime Bulletin. He also got a letter from his aunt describing the incident as vividly as if she had been there herself. The Barshwat Prime ran a series of increasingly intemperate editorials calling upon all the nations of Damorlan to unite against the Earthmen; it was spirit that counted, it said, rather than technology. Malesor wrote a letter asking how superior spiritual values could compete against presumably superior weapons. He read it aloud in the Purple Furbush before he sent it to the editor of the Barshwat Prime, which was lucky, because the Prime never printed it, although the Dordonec Bulletin ran a copy.

HOWEVER, the Barshwat Prime did print letters from editors in different countries. All of them pledged firm moral support. It also printed a letter from an anonymous correspondent in Katund which alleged that there was an Earth spy in that village, disguised as a Damorlant, and it was this spy who was personally responsible for the decline of musical taste on the whole planet. But the Bulletin seemed to consider this merely as an emanation from the lunatic fringe: "It would be as easy to disguise a hix as one of us as an Earthman. And, although we could certainly not minimize the importance of music in our culture, it is hardly likely that Earth would be attempting to achieve fell purposes through undermining that art. No, the decline in musical taste represents part of the general decline in public morality which has left us an easy prey."

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Irik went back to Barshwat to help riot, but he left the Katundi convinced that Clarey was, if not actually an Earthman, at least a traitor. When he came into the Furbush, everybody got up and left. Nobody patronized the branch library any more. The constant readers went to the main library at Zrig, and, since the trip was expensive, their books were usually overdue and they had to pay substantial fines. Sometimes they never returned the books at all and messengers had to be sent from the city. Finally the chief librarian at Zrig issued a regulation that only those resident within the city limits could take books out; all others in the district had to read them on the premises. The Katundi blamed that on Clarey, too. One night they broke into his library and stole all the best-sellers.

A couple of days later, he came home and found all the windows of his dome broken. Best-sellers are often disappointing, he thought. He found a note from Embelsira, saying, "I have gone home to Mother."

He knew she expected him to go after her, but he wrote her a note saying he was going to see his aunt who was terrified by all the riots, and put it in the mail, so she wouldn't get it too soon. He packed his kit with his most important possessions and he took his ulerin under his arm.

When he reached Barshwat, he had some difficulty getting through the crowd in front of Earth Headquarters. All the windows were boarded up and the garbage hadn't been collected for a considerable length of time. Just as he reached the door, a familiar voice called, "That's the Earth spy!"

"Don't be silly!" another voice said. "He's obviously one of us!"

"But a traitor!" cried another voice. "Otherwise why go in there?" Stones splattered against the door, followed by impartial cries of "Spy! . . . Traitor! . . . Fool!" the last seemingly addressed to each other, rather than Clarey.

Blynn was haggard and anxious-looking "I've been wondering when you'd show up. Afraid maybe they'd got you — "

"I'm all right," Clarey interrupted. "But what are we going to do?"

Blynn laughed without stopping for a full minute. "Do? I'll tell you what we're going to do. We're going to sit tight and wait for the staff ship."

Two months later the staff ship came. Blynn radioed for the general and the secretary to come in a closed ground car.

"But why?" the general's voice crackled plaintively over the

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com-unit. "I thought we didn't want them to know about ground cars — "

"They know," Blynn said crisply. "They've got one of their own now, maybe more. Crazy-looking thing, but it works. You'll see it outside Headquarters when you get here. The letters on the side mean 'Earthmen, Go!' Form imperative impolite emphatic."

Han Vollard strode into Headquarters, eyes ablaze. "Why didn't you send a report before trouble started? How could you allow an emergency situation to happen?"

Neither Blynn nor Carey said anything.

"Very distressing thing," Spano declared. "Maybe it hit them so suddenly they didn't know it was building."

"You and Blynn get over to the ship right away for deep-probing," Han Vollard ordered, as both began to speak at once. "It's the only way I'll be able to get a coherent report."

After the results came through, her anger was cold, searing, unwomanly. "You knew a year ago that things were beginning to go wrong and you didn't even mention it on the tapes! I could have both of you broken for this."

"If only that were all there was to worry about," Clarey sighed wistfully.

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SHE WHIRLED on him. "Stop feeling sorry for yourself!" The sudden loss of control in that dark amazon was more threatening than anything that had happened yet.

"I'm not feeling sorry for myself," he said. "It's the Damorlanti I feel sorry for."

"You feel sorry for them because you identify with them. That makes you sorry for yourself."

She misunderstood his motives as she misunderstood everything he did or said, but their rapport wasn't at stake now. "What are you going to do?" he forced himself to ask.

"The decision will have to be made on Earth. Unless you mean what's going to happen to you? That's simple — you'll go back with us. Blynn will stay here, pending orders."

The colonel saluted.

"But I thought I was going to stay here ten years," said Clarey.

"Five to ten years," she corrected. "Apparently five was enough — " She cut herself short. "What's the matter with me?" she suddenly exclaimed. "I've been letting myself think in the same woolly way you do."

Suddenly, almost frighteningly, she smiled. "Clarey, you *did* the job we sent you out to do! You did it better than we expected! What threw me off was that we sent you out to act as an observer. Instead, you became a catalyst!"

She seized his hand and wrung it warmly. "Clarey, I apologize. You've done a splendid job!"

He wrenched his hand from her grasp. "I didn't act as a catalyst! It would have happened anyway." His voice rang in his own horrified ears — a voice begging for reassurance.

And she was a woman; she had maternal instincts; she reassured him. "It would have happened anyway," she said soothingly, "but it would have dragged on for years, cost the taxpayers billions."

"And now," he whispered, still unable to believe that the thing had really happened, "will you... dispose of everyone on Damorlant?"

She smiled and threw herself into a chair, her body limp and tired and contended-looking. "Come, Clarey, we're not that ruthless. Some kind of quarantine will probably be worked out. We just made the whole thing sound more drastic to appeal to your patriotism."

The general beamed. "So everything has worked out all right, after all? I knew it would. I always had the utmost confidence in you, Clarey."

She was busily planning. "We'll arrange some kind of heroic accident . . . I have it! You died

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saving your aunt from the flames."

"What flames?"

"The flames of the fire that burned down her house. She died of the local equivalent of shock. Embelsira will be rich, so she'll want to believe the story. She'll be able to find herself another husband; she'll have children. She'll be better off, Clarey."

He looked at her, his misery welling out of his eyes.

"Oh, I don't mean it that way, man! All I meant was that you're a human being; she's not. I'm not saying one is better than the other. I'm saying they're different."

"But I felt less different with her, with the Damorlanti, than with anyone on Earth," he said.

She walked across to the window and looked out at the Damorlanti rioting ineptly below. "Most of us are happier in our dream world," she said at last, "but society couldn't function if we were allowed to stay there."

"Damorlan wasn't a dream world."

"But it will be," she said.

AND SO Clarey went back to Earth on the staff ship. Once its luxury would have given him pleasure; now the cabin with its taps that gave out plain water, salt water, mineral water, and assorted cordials held no charm; neither did the self-contained tri-di projector-receiver. The only reason he stayed there most of the time was to avoid the others. However, he couldn't avoid turning up in the dining salon for meals. The greater his sorrow, the greater his appetite.

One day after lunch, Han stopped him forcibly, grasping his arm. "I've got to talk to you. Afterward you can go off and sulk if you want to. But we're going to make planetfall in a few days. It's necessary to discuss your future now."

"I have no future," he said.

"Come this way, Clarey. That's an order!"

Obediently, he followed her into a lounge that was a dazzle of color and splendor. There were eight pseudo-windows, each framing a pseudo-scene of a different planet at a different season. The harsh, barren summer of Mars, the cold, bleak winter of Ksud, the gentle green spring of Earth . . . It must be a park, he knew; in no other place on Earth could spring be manifest — and yet it gave him a little pang to look at it. He tore his eyes away to turn them toward the others, and then up at the domed ceiling, fashioned to resemble a blue sky with clouds drifting across it. A domed ceiling . . . and he thought of the domes of Damorlan, light-

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years away among the stars . . .

"I'm afraid the décor's a bit gaudy," Han apologized. "We didn't check the decorator's past performance until it was too late. But it's comfortable, anyway. Try one of these chairs. They accommodate themselves to the form."

She threw herself on a chaise lounge that accommodated itself perfectly to her form. She wasn't wearing her usual opulent secretarial garb, but something simple of clinging stuff that occasionally went transparent. So we're back to the first movement, Clarey though wearily.

He made sure that the chair opposite her was old-style before he lowered himself into it. "Where's the general? I thought he always sat in on these conferences."

"The formalities are over now," she said, smiling up at him. "Besides," she added, "if he doesn't take a nap after lunch, it wreaks havoc with his digestion. Afraid to be alone with me, Clarey?" she asked huskily.

"Yes," he said, rising, "as a matter of fact, I am, now that you mention it."

She sat up. "Sit down!"

He sat down.

She didn't recline again. Her dress went opaque, but her voice grew silken once more. "Listen, Clarey, I don't want you to think we're cheating you out of anything we promised. Even though you stayed only five years, you're going to have it all. You'll have U-E status — "

"What do I want that for?"

"Doesn't it mean anything to you any more, Clarey? It used to mean a lot, though you denied it even to yourself."

"Did it?" He forced his thoughts back through time. "I suppose it did. But I've changed. You know, those five years on Damorlan seem like — "

"Like a lifetime," she finished. "Couldn't we dispense with the clichés?"

"On Damorlan the things I said were fresh and interesting. On Damorlan I was somebody pretty special. I'd rather be a big second-hand fish in a small primitive puddle. Isn't there *some* way — "

"No way at all, Clarey! The puddle's drying up. We've got a nice aquarium ready for you. Why not dive in gracefully?"

"It was my puddle," he said. "I belonged."

SHE CLOSED her eyes and sank back into the chair which arched to meet the arch of her body. Lying down, she didn't look nearly as tall. "All right, let's give the whole opera one final run-through. Nobody cared for you on Earth; on Damorlan your

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friends liked you; your wife loved you. On Earth you never felt welcome and/or appreciated; on Damorlan you felt both welcome and appreciated. On Earth — "

He was stung out of his apathy. "That's right! I'm not saying I'm unique, only that I fitted — "

"How about trying to look at it from another point of view? Did it ever occur to you that, if the Damorlanti accepted you, so might your own people, if you approached them in the same way? Did you ever *try* to make friends on Earth?"

"But on Earth I shouldn't have to. They were my own people."

"Aha!" she cried gleefully.

"I mean — well, General Spano said it would be wrong to stoop to hypocrisy to win the friendship of my own people; that, if I did, their friendship wouldn't be worth anything. You can't buy friendship."

"You bought your ulerin. Does it play any the worse because you paid for it? Does it mean any the less to you?"

"What you're getting at," he said cautiously, "is that that's the way to make friends? By being a hypocrite?"

"Was it a sham with the Damorlanti?"

He had to stop for a moment before he could bring out an answer. "It started out as a sham — but I really got to like them afterward. Then it was real."

"So then you weren't a hypocrite, Clarey." Her voice grew more resonant. "Open yourself to people, show them that you want to be friends. Basically, everybody's shy and timid inside."

"Like you?" he said, casting an ironical glance at her dress.

"That's still the outside," she smiled, making, no move to adjust it. "Listen to me, Clarey, and don't go off on sidetracks: The people of Earth are your own people. Your loyalties have always been with them."

She had almost had him convinced, but this he couldn't swallow. "If my loyalties had been with Earth, I would have sent back reports of the trouble. But I didn't. I tried to stop it from happening. There just wasn't anything I could do."

"The deep-probe never lies, Clarey. You didn't really try to stop it." She paused, and then went on deliberately: "Because you could have stopped it, you know quite easily."

"There was nothing I could have done," he stated. "Nothing."

"Remember the first time the staff ship came? Just before you left for Barshwat, the woman told you she suspected you were an Earthman. You were afraid for her. Do you remember that?"

He nodded. Yes, he remembered how terrified he had been

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then, how relieved afterward, thinking everything was going to be all right. Lucky he hadn't realized the truth, or he wouldn't have had those extra years of happiness.

HAN WENT on remorselessly: "And you thought if only something would happen to you en route, she would be safe. We might guess why it had happened, but we couldn't know for sure. We'd have had to start all over again."

He couldn't move, couldn't speak, couldn't think. She spaced each word carefully, sweetly. "You were quite right. Because you were the only man on Earth, Clarey, who had the particular physical requirements and the particular kind of mental instability that we needed for the job. You just said you weren't unique, Clarey. You were too modest; you are. If you'd killed yourself then, your death would have served a purpose; you would have died a hero. Kill yourself now and you die a coward."

"But at least I'd be dead. I wouldn't have to live with a coward for the rest of my life."

"You're not a coward, Clarey," she said. "You wouldn't admit it, but you are and always have been a patriot. To you, Earth came first. It's as simple as that."

She had deep-probed his mind. She must know his true feelings. There was no gainsaying that. He could know only his surface thoughts; she knew what lay behind and beneath. And, he reminded himself, at the end the Damorlanti were actually turning on him.

"Try to think of the whole thing as a course in charm that you've passed with flying colors," she said.

"It seems rather an expensive way of making me charming," he couldn't help saying, with the last struggle of something that was dying in him, something alien that perhaps should never have been there in the first place.

"Whole civilizations have been sacrificed for nothing at all. This one will not be sacrificed, only quarantined. But its contribution could be of cosmic magnitude."

"Now what are you going to try to sell me?" he asked drearily. "Are you saying that the essence of the Damorlant civilization is going to live on in me, that I carry its heritage inside myself, and so I have a tremendous responsibility to the Damorlanti on my shoulders?"

She laughed. "You're really getting sharp, Clarey. If you stayed in the service, you could be one of our best operatives. But you're not going to stay in the service. Yours is a higher destiny. Here, catch!"

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She tossed him something that glittered as it arched through the air.

It was a U-E identcube, made out in his name. He had only seen them at a distance, and now he was holding one warm and gleaming in his hand, with his name and his face in it. His face . . . and yet not his face.

"That's what you're going to look like when the plasto-surgeons get through," she explained. "They'll pigment your eyes and skin and hair, and they may be able to add a few inches to your height. Though I think you actually have grown a little. Something about the air, or, more likely, the food."

"Embelsira thought I was handsome the way I was. Embelsira . . ." But Embelsira was light-years away. Embelsira was part of a fading dream — and he was awakening now to reality.

"Look at the cube. Look at your status symbol."

He looked at it, and he kept on looking at it. He couldn't tear his eyes away. He was hypnotized by the golden glitter of it, the golden meaning of it. "Musician," he said aloud. "Musician. . . ." A dream word, a magic word. He hadn't thought of it for years, but this he didn't have to reach back for. Once touched on, it surged over him, complete with its memories.

BUT SHE had made it meaningless, too. He managed to tear a laugh out of his throat. "Spano said I'd be able to buy the Musicians' Guild when I had my million and a half. Apparently you've been able to bargain them down."

"This cost nothing except the standard initiation fee," she told him. "You came by it honestly — through your music, nothing else. And you have more than a million and a half credits, Clarey — nearly ten times that, with more pouring in every day."

She touched a boss on the side of her chair and white light hazed around them. "I think we're close enough to Earth to get some of the high-power tri-dis," she said, "although we can't expect perfect reception."

Blurrily, a show formed — a variety show. At first it seemed the same sort of thing that he remembered dimly, more interesting now because it had almost the character of novelty. Then an ornate young man appeared and it took deeper significance. He was carrying a musical instrument — refined, machined, carefully pitched. He played music on the ulerin while a trio sang insipid Terrestrial words. "Love Is a Guiding Star" they called it, but that didn't matter. It was one of the tunes Clarey had taped.

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She touched another boss. The blur reformed to a symphony orchestra, playing as background music to a soloist with another ulerin. "That's your First Ulerin Concerto," she said. "There are three more."

Another program was beginning, an account of the tribulations of an unfortunate Plutonian family. It faded in to the strains of ulerin music, to a tune of Clarey's. If they could have endured it to the end, she told him, it would have faded out the same way. "Every time they play it," she said, "somewhere on Earth a cash register rings for you. And this one's a daily program."

He watched transfixed and transfigured as program after program featured his music, his ulerin.

"Not just on Earth," Han said, "but on all the civilized planets, even in a few of the more sophisticated primitive ones. You're a famous man, Clarey. Earth is waiting for you, literally and figuratively. There'll be ulerin orchestras to greet you at the field; we sent a relay ahead to let them know you were coming."

But his mind was slowly alerting itself. "And where am I supposed to be coming from, then, since they're never to hear about Damorlan?"

"They've been told that you retired to a lonely asteroid to work — to perfect your art and its instrument."

Of course they couldn't divulge the truth about Damorlan. "It seems a little unfair, though," he said.

"Why unfair? After all, Clarey, the music is yours. You took Damorlan's melodies and made them into music. You took their ulerin and made it into a musical instrument. They're all yours, every note and bladder of them."

She reached over and put out a hand to him. "And I'm yours, too, Clarey, if you want me," she breathed. There was obviously no doubt in her mind that he did want her. And in his, too. One didn't reject the Secretary of Space.

He took the chilly hand in his. The skin was odd in texture. I'm imagining things, he thought. It's a long time since I touched a human female's hand.

"I must be a very important Musician," he said aloud.

SHE NODDED, not pretending to misunderstand. "Yes, important enough to rate the original and not a reasonable facsimile. You're a lucky man, Clarey." And then she smiled up at him. "I can be warm and tender, I assure you."

It took him a moment to realize what she meant. For a

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moment he had that pang again. She would never be the same as Embelsira, but a man needed change to develop.

He was still troubled, though. "I want to do *something*. Even an empty gesture's better than none at all. The last few months, I started putting together a longer thing; I guess it could be a symphony. When I finish it, I'd like to call it the 'Damorlant Symphony.' "

"Why not?" she said. He thought she was humoring him, but she added, "They'll think you just picked the name from an astrogation chart."

In a final burst of irony he dedicated the "Damorlant Symphony" to the human race, but, as usual, he was misunderstood. In fact, one of the music critics — all of whom were enthusiastic over the new work — wrote, "At last we have a great musician who is also a great humanist."

Eventually Clarey forgot his original intent and came to believe it himself.

— EVELYN E. SMITH

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ROBERT M. GUINN, *Publisher*

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 15th day of September, 1960.

Joan J. DeMario, Notary Public, State of New York, No. 24-5978800. Qualified in Kings County. Term expires March 30, 1962.

JOAN J. DeMARIO

(My commission expires March 30, 1962)

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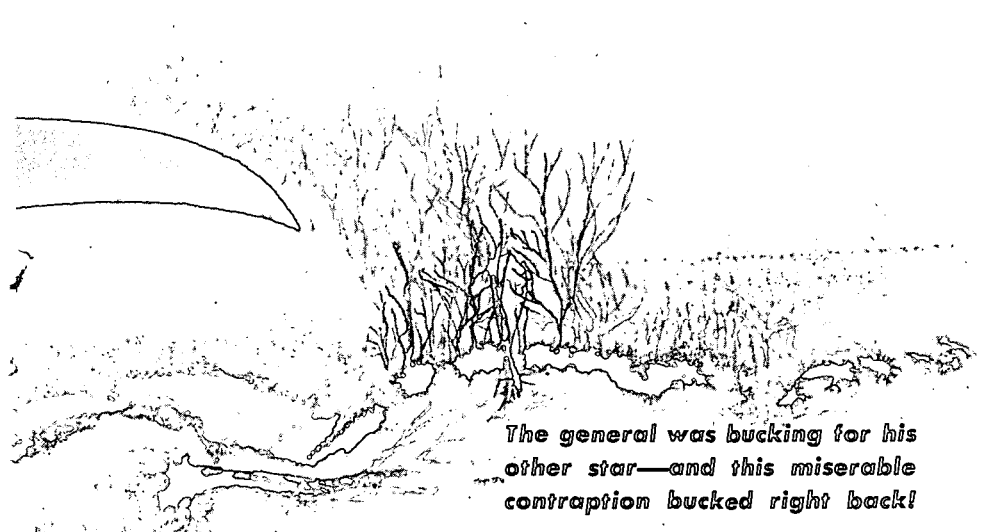


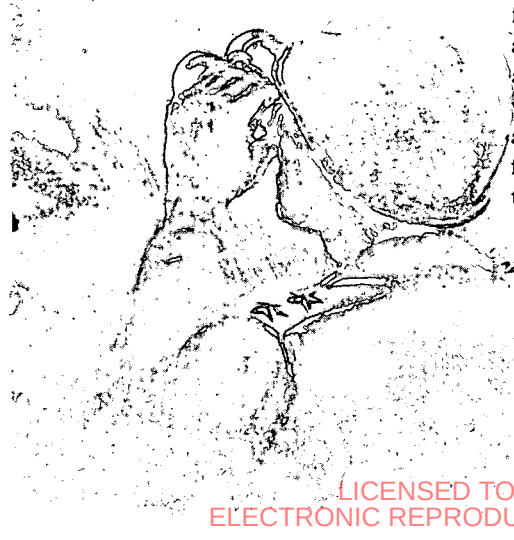
The general was bucking for his other star—and this miserable contraption bucked right back!

DOORSTEP

By KEITH LAUMER

Illustrated by RITTER

STEADYING his elbow on the kitchen table serving as desk, Brigadier General Straut leveled his binoculars and stared out through the second-floor window of the farmhouse at the bulky object lying canted at the edge of the wood lot. He watched the figures moving over and around the gray mass, then flipped the lever on the field telephone at his elbow.



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"How are your boys doing, Major?"

"General, since that box this morning —"

"I know all about the box, Bill. So does Washington by now. What have you got that's new?"

"Sir, I haven't got anything to report yet. I have four crews on it, and she still looks impervious as hell."

"Still getting the sounds from inside?"

"Intermittently, General."

"I'm giving you one more hour, Major. I want that thing cracked."

The general dropped the phone back on its cradle and peeled the cellophane from a cigar absently. He had moved fast, he reflected, after the State Police notified him at nine forty-one last night. He had his men on the spot, the area evacuated of civilians, and a preliminary report on its way to Washington by midnight. At two thirty-six, they had discovered the four-inch cube lying on the ground fifteen feet from the huge object — missile, capsule, bomb — whatever it was. But now — several hours later — nothing new.

The field phone jangled. Straut grabbed it up.

"General, we've discovered a thin spot up on the top side. All we can tell so far is that the wall thickness falls off there . . ."

"All right. Keep after it, Bill."

This was more like it. If Brigadier General Straut could have this thing wrapped up by the time Washington awoke to the fact that it was something big — well, he'd been waiting a long time for that second star. This was his chance, and he would damn well make the most of it.

HE looked across the field at the thing. It was half in and half out of the woods, flat-sided, round-ended, featureless. Maybe he should go over and give it a closer look personally. He might spot something the others were missing. It might blow them all to kingdom come any second; but what the hell, he had earned his star on sheer guts in Normandy. He still had 'em.

He keyed the phone. "I'm coming down, Bill," he told the Major. On impulse, he strapped a pistol belt on. Not much use against a house-sized bomb, but the heft of it felt good.

The thing looked bigger than ever as the jeep approached it, bumping across the muck of the freshly plowed field. From here he could see a faint line running around, just below the juncture of side and top. Major Greer

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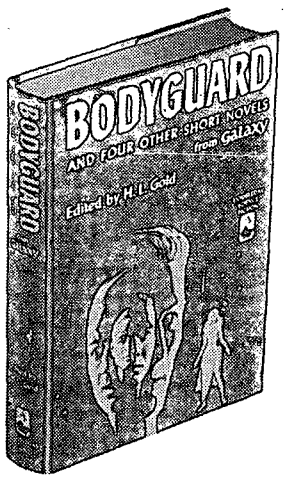

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hadn't mentioned that. The line was quite obvious; in fact, it was more of a crack.

With a sound like a baseball smacking the catcher's glove, the crack opened, the upper half tilted, men sliding — then impossibly it stood open, vibrating, like the roof of a house suddenly lifted. The driver gunned the jeep. There were cries, and a ragged shrilling that set Straut's teeth on edge. The men were running back now, two of them dragging a third.

Major Greer emerged from behind the object, looked about, ran toward General Straut shouting. " . . . a man dead. It snapped; we weren't expecting it . . ."

Straut jumped out beside the men, who had stopped now and were looking back. The underside of the gaping lid was an iridescent black. The shrill noise sounded thinly across the field. Greer arrived, panting.

"What happened?" Straut snapped.

"I was . . . checking over that thin spot, General. The first thing I knew it was . . . coming up under me. I fell; Tate was at the other side. He held on and it snapped him loose, against a tree. His skull —"

"What the devil's that racket?"

"That's the sound we were getting from inside before, General. There's something in there, alive —"

"All right, pull yourself together, Major. We're not unprepared. Bring your half-tracks into position. The tanks will be here soon."

Straut glanced at the men standing about. He would show them what leadership meant.

"You men keep back," he said. He puffed his cigar calmly as he walked toward the looming object. The noise stopped suddenly; that was a relief. There was a faint and curious odor in the air, something like chlorine . . . or seaweed . . . or iodine.

There were no marks in the ground surrounding the thing. It had apparently dropped straight in to its present position. It was heavy, too — the soft soil was displaced in a mound a foot high all along the side.

Behind him, Straut heard a yell. He whirled. The men were pointing; the jeep started up, churned toward him, wheels spinning. He looked up. Over the edge of the gray wall, six feet above his head, a great reddish limb, like the claw of a crab, moved, groping.

Straut yanked the .45 from its holster, jacked the action and fired. Soft matter spattered, and the claw jerked back. The screeching started up again angrily, then was drowned in the

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engine roar as the jeep slid to a stop.

Straut stooped, grabbed up a leaf to which a quivering lump adhered, jumped into the vehicle as it leaped forward; then a shock and they were going into a spin and . . .

"LUCKY it was soft ground," somebody said. And somebody else asked, "What about the driver?"

Silence. Straut opened his eyes. "What . . . about . . ."

A stranger was looking down at him, an ordinary-looking fellow of about thirty-five.

"Easy, now, General Straut. You've had a bad spill. Everything is all right. I'm Professor Lieberman, from the University."

"The driver," Straut said with an effort.

"He was killed when the jeep went over."

"Went . . . over?"

"The creature lashed out with a member resembling a scorpion's stinger. It struck the jeep and flipped it. You were thrown clear. The driver jumped and the jeep rolled on him."

Straut pushed himself up. "Where's Greer?"

"I'm right here, sir." Major Greer stepped up, stood attentively.

"Those tanks here yet?"

"No, sir. I had a call from General Margrave; there's some sort of holdup. Something about not destroying scientific material. I did get the mortars over from the base."

Straut got to his feet. The stranger took his arm. "You ought to lie down, General —"

"Who the hell is going to make me? Greer, get those mortars in place, spaced between your tracks."

The telephone rang. Straut seized it. "General Straut."

"General Margrave here, Straut. I'm glad you're back on your feet. There'll be some scientists from the State University coming over. Cooperate with them. You're going to have to hold things together at least until I can get another man in there to—"

"Another man? General Margrave, I'm not incapacitated. The situation is under complete control —"

"It is, is it? I understand you've got still another casualty. What's happened to your defensive capabilities?"

"That was an accident, sir. The jeep —"

"We'll review that matter at a later date. What I'm calling about is more important right now. The code men have made some headway on that box of yours. It's putting out a sort of transmission."

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"What kind, sir?"

"Half the message — it's only twenty seconds long, repeated — is in English. It's a fragment of a recording from a daytime radio program; one of the network men here identified it. The rest is gibberish. They're still working over it."

"What —"

"Bryant tells me he thinks there may be some sort of correspondence between the two parts of the message. I wouldn't know, myself. In my opinion, it's a threat of some sort."

"I agree, General. An ultimatum."

"Right. Keep your men back at a safe distance from now on. I want no more casualities."

STRAUT cursed his luck as he hung up the phone. Margrave was ready to relieve him, after he had exercised every precaution. He had to do something fast, before this opportunity for promotion slipped out of his hands.

He looked at Major Greer. "I'm neutralizing this thing once and for all. There'll be no more men killed."

Lieberman stood up. "General! I must protest any attack against this—"

Straut whirled. "I'm handling this, Professor. I don't know who let you in here or why — but I'll make the decisions. I'm stopping this man-killer before it comes out of its nest, maybe gets into that village beyond the woods. There are four thousand civilians there. It's my job to protect them." He jerked his head at Greer, strode out of the room.

Lieberman followed, pleading. "The creature has shown no signs of aggressiveness, General Straut —"

"With two men dead?"

"You should have kept them back —"

"Oh, it was my fault, was it?" Straut stared at Lieberman with cold fury. This civilian pushed his way in here, then had the infernal gall to accuse him, Brigadier General Straut, of causing the death of his own men. If he had the fellow in uniform for five minutes . . .

"You're not well, General. That fall —"

"Keep out of my way, Professor," Straut said. He turned and went on down the stairs. The present foul-up could ruin his career; and now this egghead interference . . .

With Greer at his side, Straut moved out to the edge of the field.

"All right, Major. Open up with your .50 calibers."

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Greer called a command and a staccato rattle started up. The smell of cordite and the blue haze of gunsmoke — this was more like it. He was in command here.

Lieberman came up to Straut. "General, I appeal to you in the name of science. Hold off a little longer; at least until we learn what the message is about."

"Get back from the firing line, Professor." Straut turned his back on the civilian, raised the glasses to observe the effect of the recoilless rifle. There was a tremendous smack of displaced air, and a thunderous boom as the explosive shell struck. Straut saw the gray shape jump, the raised lid waver. Dust rose from about it. There was no other effect.

"Keep firing, Greer," Straut snapped, almost with a feeling of triumph. The thing was impervious to artillery; now who was going to say it was no threat?

"How about the mortars, sir?" Greer said. "We can drop a few rounds right inside it."

"All right, try that before the lid drops."

And what we'll try next, I don't know, he thought.

THE mortar fired with a muffled thud. Straut watched tensely. Five seconds later, the object erupted in a gout of pale pink debris. The lid rocked, pinkish fluid running down its opalescent surface. A second burst, and a third. A great fragment of the menacing claw hung from the branch of a tree a hundred feet from the ship.

Straut grabbed up the phone. "Cease fire!"

Lieberman stared in horror at the carnage.

The telephone rang. Straut picked it up.

"General Straut," he said. His voice was firm. He had put an end to the threat.

"Straut, we've broken the message," General Margrave said excitedly. "It's the damnedest thing I ever . . ."

Straut wanted to interrupt, announce his victory, but Margrave was droning on.

". . . strange sort of reasoning, but there was a certain analogy. In any event, I'm assured the translation is accurate. Here's how it reads in English . . ."

Straut listened. Then he carefully placed the receiver back on the hook.

Lieberman stared at him. "What did it say?"

Straut cleared his throat. He turned and looked at Lieberman for a long moment before answering.

"It said, 'Please take good care of my little girl.' "

— KEITH LAUMER

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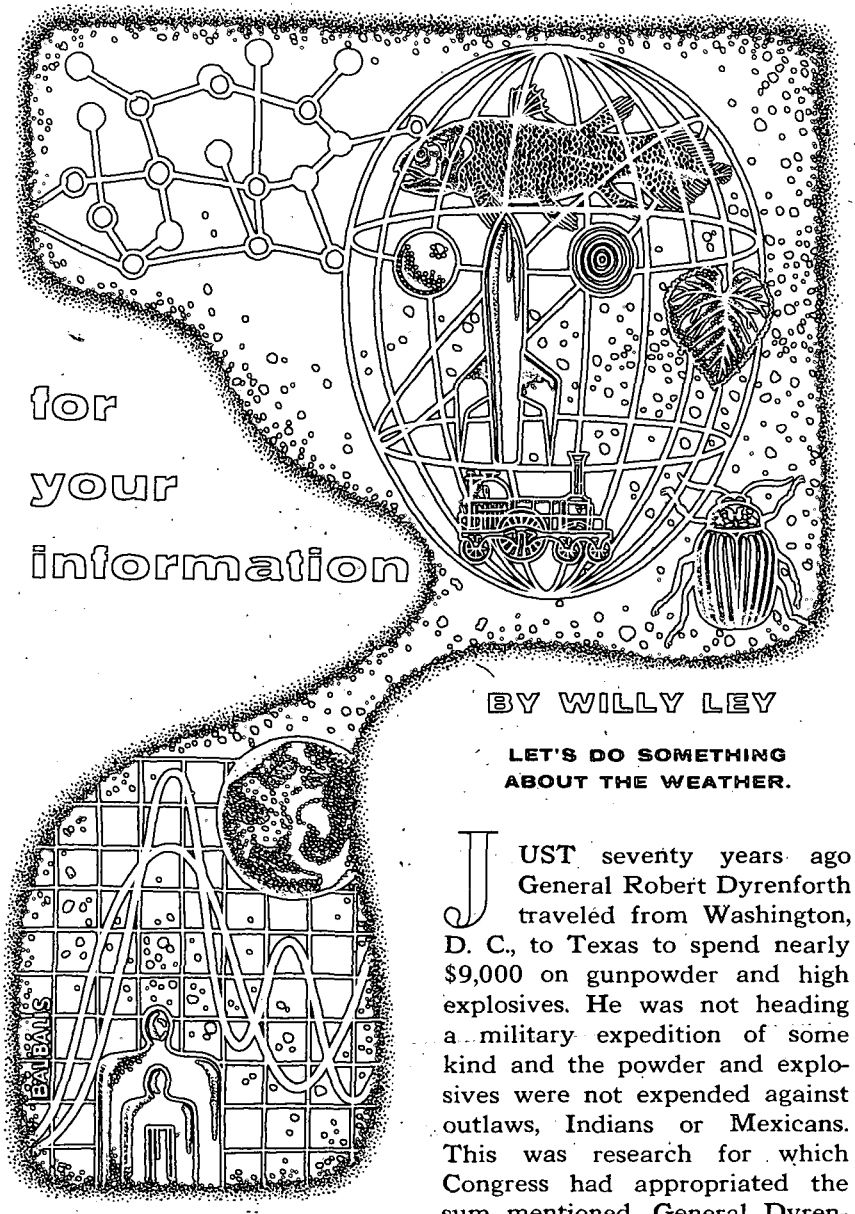

BY WILLY LEY

LET'S DO SOMETHING ABOUT THE WEATHER.

JUST seventy years ago General Robert Dyrenforth traveled from Washington, D. C., to Texas to spend nearly $9,000 on gunpowder and high explosives. He was not heading a military expedition of some kind and the powder and explosives were not expended against outlaws, Indians or Mexicans. This was research for which Congress had appropriated the sum mentioned. General Dyren-

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forth by that time was no longer an active military man but represented the Department of Agriculture. And the explosions were set off to influence the weather, to cause rain if it could be done. It was the first instance of large-scale research on weather control.

Did it work?

It did rain occasionally after a few barrels of gunpowder had been set off. But if some Texan who stood around and watched the activities claimed that it would have rained anyway, there wasn't much General Dyrenforth or anybody else could say in reply. The increase in rainfall was not decisive.

The whole experiment had been an outgrowth of a story, revived by the Civil War, that had started in Europe a century or so earlier. Veterans of the Seven Years' War told anybody willing to listen how every big battle had been followed by a downpour. After the Napoleonic wars the story was revived, and again after the Civil War in the Western Hemisphere.

By 1869 an American engineer by the name of Powers decided to collect all stories of this kind — of course not all the stories were purely military; some of them related to rains following the accidental explosion of powder magazines — and to check on their accuracy as far as this could be done. Powers was so convinced that the stories were accurate that he titled his book *War and Weather*. It appeared in 1871 and was the ultimate reason for the appropriation of $9,000 to the Department of Agriculture.

POWERS' book was not the first work to say that human activities, voluntary and involuntary, influenced the weather. In 1841 another American, James Pollard Espy, had published a book with the title *Philosophy of Storms*. In this book he explained that rainfall was often caused by large fires, as for example forest fires. He reasoned that the air heated by the fire would rise, other air had to rush in laterally, and a fire which lasted for some time would therefore produce convection currents leading to the formation of cumulus clouds from which it would rain. It should be said right now that this does happen, but not every time.

The adherents of the "gunpowder theory" did not claim that explosions caused the clouds but felt that the shock waves caused by the explosions induced the clouds to shed their moisture. At a later date this theory was somewhat amended by saying that the solid particles released into the atmosphere in the form

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of smoke acted as "condensation kernels" on which the water vapor of the clouds could condense.

Parallel with the belief that the gunfire of a battle caused rain to fall, another belief grew up which does not seem to have made its way to the New World and which cannot be traced in detail even in Europe, where it was confined to the countries to the north of the Alps. That was the belief that shooting, even if it did not produce rain, at least would prevent hail. Many townships, especially in agricultural regions, bought cannon and held them ready to fire oversized charges but without projectiles whenever a cloud which looked as if it might ruin the crops with hail appeared in the sky. Whether it actually did any good is doubted by all meteorologists, but at the time it certainly looked as if it were effective. In the first place, not every black cloud is a hail cloud. In the second place, the hail cloud might sail on, and who cared about hail in the next region? In the meantime the hail cannon got all the credit.

To return to scientific reasoning: during the period from, say, 1875 to 1890, it was realized that some cooling effects in the clouds must have had something to do with the onset of precipitation. Well, if such was the case it might be possible to help the cooling along. Somebody by the name of Louis Gathmann is on record as having been the first man to suggest (in 1891) shooting liquid carbon dioxide into reluctant rain clouds.

THERE are scattered records of some early experiments with what we now call "cloud seeding" performed prior to the First World War. Each and every one of these experiments seems to have been severely underfinanced and none of them was conclusive. Besides, the experimenters did not yet know the necessary details; modern cloud seeding looks for clouds which are already supercooled and just tries to trigger them. The early experimenters apparently tried to make clouds by cooling the air with their carbon dioxide or liquid air. It isn't completely impossible that this may be made to work, but it would require enormous quantities of cooling agents, and if it could be made to work, it certainly would not pay.

The first modern experiments along those lines were performed in 1930 in Holland by Augustus W. Veraart and they do sound "modern." To begin with, he used an airplane. And he seeded clouds with "dry ice" and with a mixture of "dry ice" (frozen carbon dioxide) and supercooled normal

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ice crystals. While the experiments themselves were quite scientific, Veraart's presentation of them apparently was not. He is said to have made such exaggerated claims that he annoyed people just by the way he made them. At any event the Royal Dutch Ministry of Agriculture as well as the Royal Dutch Meteorological Society publicly washed their hands of the whole affair, with the result that other researchers did not even bother to read Veraart's articles, which were written in Dutch.

There followed some theoretical work. In 1933 the Swedish meteorologist Tor Bergeron stated that it should be possible to release rain from existing clouds by introducing ice crystals into them. Five years later the German physicist Walter Findeisen went over the problem mathematically and especially emphasized the need for the natural presence of supercooled water droplets while the ice crystals were being introduced. As often happens in science, Bergeron's and Findeisen's works were later lumped under the name of the "Bergeron-Findeisen Theory" which makes it sound as if they had cooperated in the formulation.

The next chapter in the story bears the name of a company: General Electric. It was one of those stories which would sound pretty weak if it were fiction, but in reality things happen that way sometimes. It began with a request by the Chemical Warfare Board to find out just how the filters in gas masks do their work.

General Electric's chief scientist, Dr. Irving Langmuir, assisted by Dr. Vincent J. Schaefer, went to work. Now if you want to test filters, you must test them on something. So Langmuir and Schaefer started producing all kinds of "smokes," which led to research on smoke screens in all kinds of weather. Cold-weather research prompted them to investigate aircraft icing. The icing of an airplane wing obviously builds up from particles in the cloud, hence the next point was to investigate how ice particles in clouds grew.

SCHAEFER found that crystals of dry ice did cause supercooled clouds (small laboratory type) to form water ice crystals. Bergeron and Findeisen had been right. The next problem was somewhat different. The tiny ice crystals would stay aloft with the cloud. Would they grow large enough to fall out of the cloud, melting into raindrops before they hit the ground? This had to be tested in the open and in November 1946 Dr. Schaefer started scattering dry ice pellets

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into clouds from above. Yes, the ice crystals did grow large enough to fall from the cloud.

Soon afterward another researcher, Dr. Bernard Vonnegut, discovered that microscopic silver iodide crystals — one of the "smokes" that had been made — were more efficient than ice or dry ice. For some reason silver iodide crystals will cause ice to form at higher temperatures than either dry ice or water ice.

Once it had been established that something could be done, several branches of the government started specific projects. One was Project Cirrus, paid for by the Army and Navy with airplanes supplied by the Air Force. Another was the Cloud Physics Project, sponsored by the Weather Bureau, the Air Force, the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (NACA, now NASA) with Navy equipment. Then came the Department of Defense's Artificial Cloud Nucleation Project.

The result of all this work can be summed up in one sentence: You can make it rain if the right kind of cloud is available.

A hundred years ago this would have been acclaimed as a fantastic achievement. But now you hear voices saying, "Is that all? Can't we *really* do something about the weather? Can't we at least prevent or stop a hurricane?" And you hear complaints like, "Why doesn't anybody think big any more? Why don't they try to melt the polar icecap? It would be so simple. And whatever happened to the suggestion by the Russian fellow who wants to put a ring around the Earth like that of the planet Saturn?"

As for hurricanes, a big research program is on the way. Before anybody can suggest what might be done, he has to know with as much detail as possible what is going on. No doctor can prescribe a remedy or a treatment if he does not know what is wrong with his patient. The medical comparison may be unjust, but one of my teachers (the professor of zoology who had started out as a medical student) told us with a smile that when he was a student his teacher faced a medical riddle. There were elderly people among his patients, married for 30 years or more, having slept in the same double bed all these years. One was sick, the other was not: *why didn't they infect each other?* The answer, to us, is quite simple: the patients were diabetics!

What I mean to say is that we haven't really diagnosed a hurricane yet. That nothing can be done about one which is in force is clear — the Weather Bureau estimates that a full-fledged hurricane develops about

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the energy of ten plutonium bombs per second. But once we know enough, we might be able to prevent one from developing. Or it might be possible to deflect one into areas where it will do the least harm.

NOW let's have a quick look at the "big thoughts," beginning with the arctic icecap. Ice and snow reflect sunlight well — they have, to use astronomical language, a very high albedo. If you dusted the ice over with something dark, like coal dust, the albedo would be very strongly reduced, the sunlight of the arctic summer would be utilized and the ice would be melted. Let us assume for a moment that it could be done, all climatologists, meteorologists and a good number of economists would form a united front saying that it cannot be taken for granted that this would be a wise and beneficial move.

We don't have to worry about the wisdom, however, because Dr. H. Wexler, director of meteorological research of the U. S. Weather Bureau, indulged in a little arithmetic (*Science*, Oct. 31, 1958) running as follows. The layer of coal dust would not have to be thick to do its job. One-tenth of a millimeter would prabably be enough. But the total area of the arctic ice pack north of latitude 65°N. and of the adjacent snowfields is $24 \cdot 10^6$ square kilometers. This calls for 1500 million tons of coal dust. Using C-124 Globemasters which could carry 10 tons per sortie, it would take 150 million sorties to lay down the absorbing layer. Naturally this would take a little time to do and in the meantime there should be no winds to interfere with the experiment and, of course, no fresh snow must fall on the areas already dusted, which is also difficult.

The idea published by some Russian about a ring around the Earth has precisely the same set of drawbacks. If the Earth had a ring like Saturn, the arctic and antarctic nights would be illuminated and somewhat warmed. In fact, no night would ever be completely black again; there would always be about as much light as would be shed by half a dozen full moons. Unlike the natural ring of Saturn, the artificial ring should be inclined to the equator; an inclination of about 45° would probably give the best results if the lessening of polar winter nights were the main objective. Whether this would do more good than harm is again a question we can't answer yet. Nobody can say at the moment what this steady influx of additional if reflected sunlight would do to the Earth's climate in general.

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SUPPOSE it were mainly good, what are the logistics of the operation? I don't know the Russian figures; I don't even know whether any figures were published. Therefore I had to devise my own. I assumed that the ring would start 1600 kilometers (1000 miles) above sea level and that it would be 1000 kilometers (about 600 miles) wide. I assumed a thickness of one kilometer mostly for the reason that it would be very hard to make it any thinner. That all this is in the area of the inner Van Allen belt is relatively unimportant; the rockets which lay down the ring do not have to be manned. The material would best be ice crystals (Saturn's natural ring mostly consists of ice crystals, too) since they reflect the sunlight well and do not cost much.

The area of the ring then becomes in round figures 53 million square kilometers. Since it is assumed to be one kilometer thick, its volume is the same figure in cubic kilometers. If we allot one milligram of water per cubic meter of ring volume, the calculations become quite simple. One metric ton (2204 lbs. if you insist on the measurements of the old merchant guilds) weighs 1000 million milligrams. And one cubic kilometer contains 1000 million cubic meters. Making the ring, therefore, requires as many tons of water as its volume in cubic kilometers: 53 million metric tons.

But since a milligram of water in the form of ice crystals can form more than one crystal, we might be able to cut down the necessary weight somewhat. Let's have just one ice crystal per cubic meter, instead of a milligram of ice crystals for that volume. If we say that each crystal, on the average, would weigh one-tenth of a milligram, the total amount of water would drop to 5.3 million tons. If, with super-accurate guidance, the ring can be made half a kilometer (a mere 1640 feet) in thickness, we need only 2.6 million tons.

Had enough of big thoughts?

Of course we still should try to do something about the weather. But first we have to learn much more about it.

ANY QUESTIONS?

Do meteorites hit the Moon? If so, why is there no evidence? Astronomers have assured me that, so far as we know, meteorites must hit the Moon at about the same rate (allowing for the smaller size of Luna) they hit the Earth. But if they do, they should pockmark the surfaces of the maria with craters; they should also stir up dust or pumice clouds momentarily. In either

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case we might not be able to see the impact but we should see the result. When the Moon is dark, the smash of a meteorite on stone should certainly set up a spark of light which would be visible (comparatively speaking) as a match lit a long way off on a dark night. Finally it seems reasonable that, at one time or another, since Galilei, the Moon must have been clobbered by a big meteor on the facing side. This would leave a new crater . . . but apparently no change in the Moon's surface has ever been discovered. Can you explain this odd situation?

Boyd Hill
Playa del Rey, Calif.

Well, I can try to explain it. But before I go on, I want to go on record that this reply is being typed on August 10, 1960, just in case the Moon is struck by a colossal body the next day and the whole answer becomes negligible, superfluous and obsolete.

First let us be clear about one point. The gravitational field of a planet (or large moon) is of very minor, if any, importance with regard to the number of meteorites striking it. The meteorites are simply in orbits around the sun and sometimes a planet and a meteorite happen to be on collision courses. The gravitational field of the Earth might help in changing an "almost collision course" (near miss of a quarter-mile) into a collision course, but that is all.

Therefore, in a comparison between the number of solid particles which either the Earth or the Moon will sweep out of space, we don't have to wonder about the comparison of their gravitational field. All that counts are their cross sections — the size of the "target," so to speak.

The Earth's diameter is about 7950 miles, that of the Moon about 2160. The area of "Target Earth" is, therefore, a little more than fourteen times that of "Target Moon." All you have to do is to compare the squares of the diameters, or of the radii. Since we know, or can estimate, the number of particles swept up by the Earth, the number swept up by the Moon would be about 1/14th of the figure for the Earth. But since we can see only about one-half of the lunar surface, the number of impacts that might be seen would be only 1/28th of what we get for the whole Earth. To simplify life a bit, let's say that the Earth will sustain 30 times as many hits as the visible hemisphere of the Moon.

No actual count of what hits the Earth is possible, but the generally accepted estimate is a total of 7500 million particles during a 24-hour period. Of this

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number about 6500 million particles have a diameter smaller than half a millimeter. Some 20,000 per 24-hour period will have a size of half an inch or larger. Half a dozen will be fist-sized or even larger. What our Earth sweeps out of space in the course of a day has been labeled "a very large dump truck of dust with a few pebbles in it."

How will this look to an observer? Well, everything smaller than one millimeter in diameter will simply be invisible. The ones one millimeter in diameter could be made out as a faint "shooting star" on a dark night. Those which are larger than an inch will be "rather bright," while those of the size of a man's fist would light up the landscape as they pass overhead.

Offhand, I would guess that a meteorite which hits the Moon would have to weigh at least 25 pounds to make an impact that could be seen from Earth if it hits the dark portion of the Moon and if somebody happens to be looking through a reasonably powerful telescope. Earth may collect one per month, which means that the visible portion of the Moon would collect one every three years. But remember the other requirements: somebody would have to look through a telescope at the dark portion of the Moon (which is not too customary) at the right time. Still, every once in a while an observer has reported a spot of light; in some cases it might have been a meteoric impact.

Not even a 50-pounder would produce a crater which would be visible from Earth, even through a powerful telescope. We don't know just how much would be needed, but the Russian payload that did hit the Moon gives a basis for a few guesses. The weight of that payload was around 800 pounds and the Russians fired for the center of the visible half of the Moon. Naturally they timed their shot so they would be able to observe the impact — of course when they have night, we have daylight. They claim they could observe the dust cloud caused by the impact. They calculated that the impact of the lunar probe itself would have caused a crater 600 feet in diameter and the impact of the top stage of their rocket a crater 850 feet in diameter, provided they struck a thick dust layer. For striking solid rock, the crater diameters would have been 33 feet for the probe and 50 feet for the rocket. They must have struck solid rock, because so far no photographs of the two new craters could be produced.

Since small lunar formations are pinpointed by their shadows at sunrise and sunset rather than

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by direct visibility, the failure to find the impact craters of the Russian moonshot is not surprising. At the very best they would be at the limit of detectability, if they had struck in an otherwise featureless plain. Obviously they did not. Equally obviously a 1000-pound meteorite would not produce a conspicuous crater.

One more point to be considered is the question of for how long we have good lunar maps. We can't count from the invention of the telescope — some of the names proposed by the Italian Riccioli for lunar formations are not in use now for the simple reason that modern astronomers are not sure just which formations Riccioli had in mind. We can say that we have maps which might be good enough to help in spotting a new crater for only the past 80 years. It is easily possible that nothing big enough struck the Moon on the visible hemisphere during that time.

On Earth we had two known meteorite falls of sufficient size in this period, both striking in Siberia. One was in 1908, the other a dozen years ago. (Of course a few more big ones might have fallen into the oceans, or in Greenland, or in Antarctica, though no trace has been found.) But considering the ratio of about 30 to 1, it isn't at all surprising that no new crater has appeared on the Moon during the last 80 years.

Why wouldn't it be a good idea to build some sort of catapult for getting our larger rockets off the ground?

(Name withheld)
San Francisco, Calif.

I am withholding the name because I had to reply to my correspondent that (A) it is not a good idea, that (B) I get this question about once a week and that (C) the Space Agency (NASA) gets it twice a day, if not more often. This constant stream of the same question has, incidentally, been reinforced by some magazine writer who claimed to know that this was the way the Russians got their satellites into orbit. I may insert here that it is just possible that this is one more of the many translators' mistakes which have been plaguing us recently. The Russian word for catapult is the same as ours (it is one of those international words which are the same in most languages, like "radio," "airplane," "transistor" and so forth) and it is conceivable that the word is applied to a booster rocket.

But I still have to explain why it is not a good idea.

If you want to accelerate a rocket initially by means of a

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catapult, you deal with several factors. The first one is how fast you want your rocket to be going at the instant it leaves the catapult; or, phrased differently, how much velocity you want the catapult to supply. The second factor is the length of travel of the catapult — through what distance does it move? Both these factors together tell you what the acceleration will have to be.

Now the solid-fuel booster of the old Aerobee rocket supplied just short of 1000 feet per second, or 300 meters, since 300 meters equal 984 feet. To supply any less than this velocity would not be worth the effort, so let's stick to this figure.

The three factors in question are tied together by the simple equation: $a=v^2/2s$. In this equation "a" stands for the acceleration which will result, "v^2" is the square of the velocity desired, while "s" is the distance traveled in the course of producing the desired velocity. Now let us check the values with this velocity in mind. First doing the righthand portion of the equation, we have to assume a value for "s" and for a first attempt we make "s" equal to 984 feet too, or 300 meters. Then $v^2/2s$ reads 90,000 divided by 600, which is 150. This figure stands for the mean acceleration the rocket would have to stand. One g in the metric system is 9.81 m/sec^2 so that this figure of 150 means just about 1-1/2 g.

Well, this is fine. The rocket will be able to stand an acceleration of 1-1/2 g. Yes, but no catapult is a thousand feet tall. In reality we'd probably have to be satisfied with a hundred feet, in which case our rocket would have to undergo an acceleration of 15 g. Some of the smaller solid-fuel jobs might be able to take this without being deformed (and blowing up) in the process. But a liquid-fuel rocket just could not stand this acceleration, and certainly not a big one.

So things boil down to the following choices: You provide only 100 or 200 feet per second. In this case it isn't worth the trouble. Or else you strengthen the rocket to withstand the high acceleration, in which case you have more dead weight in the rocket itself and you pay a higher penalty for the dead weight than you gain by even a thousand feet per second.

With all this we haven't yet touched another point, a rather sore one, namely the expense of the catapult — and its own weight. If you want to help an Atlas off the ground, you have to accelerate (in round figures) 100 tons. The moving portion of the catapult would have to weigh at least 10 tons. And you have to move these ten tons too. This

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will cost fuel of some kind. The same amount of fuel will do more good if it is incorporated in the rocket itself — and you save the price of the catapult.

For the Puzzle Addicts

I AM sorry I forgot to give the explanation (as quite a number of readers reminded me) of the problem of the two Dutchmen with only one bike. What you need here is not mathematics but logic. No matter how the course is broken up, each one gets to ride a total of half the total distance. So, obviously, they save travel time — as one reader proved by the use of integral equations.

Now here is another one, cribbed from a friendly European magazine the name of which will be revealed with the answer in the next issue. The sequence of the first nine whole numbers is, of course, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9. You must leave them in this sequence. But between them you may insert plus and minus signs, or multiplication signs or dividing signs. You may use the figures in the form (3 + 4 + 5) or (3 times 4) or even in the form 23 or 56. All that is needed is that they remain in their natural sequence. No fractions permitted (like 234/56), nor figures of the type of 3'.

The result must be 100.

I'll add that it can be done in several ways.

Is This Your Real Name?

THINKING about a concluding item for this column, the fact that the last two words always are my name reminded me of the most surprising question I ever got after a lecture. It was in Chicago and the custom of the particular group which sponsored my lecture was to admit written questions only, "to avoid speeches from the floor." One of these written questions read: "Is this your real name?"

I first asked back to find out whether the question concerned my own name and I heard a timid "yes," followed by the question whether it should not be Wilhelm or William. Since others may have worried about the same important problem, I'll give an answer here (as I did in the lecture hall) hoping that this will end the discussion.

No, my first name is *not* Wilhelm or William, it *is* Willy, as stated on the certificate of birth, the certificate of baptism, the certificate of confirmation and my old (German) passport. Willy (in this spelling and this spelling only) is a separate, full-fledged and officially recognized name. Contemporaries who have the

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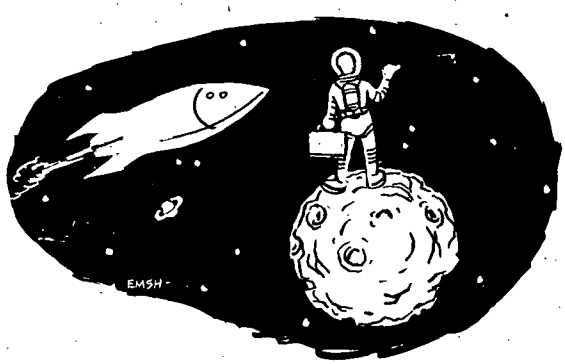
same name are Willy Brandt, the mayor of West Berlin, and Prof. Willy Messerschmitt, the airplane designer. Actually I was named after Prof. Willy Stöwer, a painter who around the time of my birth had the pleasure of knowing that reproductions of his paintings could be found in any German home. They were of ships, usually the High Seas Fleet.

As for my last name, it means "cliff" or "rock" (*e.g.*, Loreley, the first part of that designation being spelled "lure" in English). I probably had an unfortunate ancestor who was the unproud owner of land full of big rocks. I recently came across an English name with the same meaning: Stoneacre. But for those who are likely to check with books on the origin of names, I wish to add that I have done so myself. Both works I checked — one about fifty years older than the other — agree: *Ley*, "rock" or "cliff," or else derived from St. Eligius.

I didn't think the St. Eligius part could possibly apply to me, but just on principle I checked on St. Eligius and learned that he is the patron saint of the blacksmiths. Now I'm not sure which is which. My father's father was a blacksmith (until he opened a tavern) and he told me that his smithy had been family property for generations. In fact, he believed that his ancestors had settled in East Prussia as armorers to the Teutonic Knights.

In that case, I won't have to pity the unknown ancestor who was stuck with rocky land but can sign off in the knowledge that my name is really Smith.

—WILLY LEY



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Administration problems,
the Underground,
a missing volume of
his encyclopedia,
and now an old love
turned rebel—
enough was enough!

VOLUME PAA-PYX

BY FRED SABERHAGEN

Illustrated by TRATTNER

WHEN he was alone in his office with the prisoner, the director said: "Now, what is this secret you can reveal to my ears alone?"

"Are you sure none of them are listening?" The prisoner was a young man with seedy clothing and an odd haircut. As he spoke, he managed to grin in a conspiratorial way, as if he already shared some vital and amusing secret with Director Ahlgren.

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And this is about the average of the Underground, thought the director, studying his victim with distaste. And in the next room Barbara waited her turn at being interrogated. How could *she* have ever become connected, however indirectly, with the ideals or people of this Underground represented before him?

"None of them are listening," said the director, who took daily steps to discourage that sort of thing among his subordinates. It was not entirely unheard of for a Party member to turn traitor and join the Underground. "Quickly now, what have you to tell me?"

"This — I will act as a double agent for you," volunteered the young wretch, in a stage whisper, maintaining the idiotic grin. He sat propped erect in his chair by a stiff pillow the director kept handy for such use, his voluntary muscles still mainly paralyzed from the stun pistols of the Political Police.

Director Ahlgren frowned thoughtfully. He took a cigarette from a box on his plain but highly polished desk. "Care for one?"

"No, no. Do you understand what I am offering you? I am a highly trained agent, and I will betray them all to you, because you are the strongest here, and I must serve the strongest." The young man nodded earnestly as if he hoped the director would imitate the movement and so agree with him.

The director puffed smoke. "Very well, I accept. Now you must show me that you will really do what you say. Tell me the address of your contact cell."

THE YOUNG rebel contorted his forehead, in an apparent effort to conceive a stroke of Machiavellian strategy.

Ahlgren pursued him. "I know each cell of the Underground has its contact with the rest of the organization through one other cell and that you know the address of yours. How can I trust you as a double agent if you won't tell me that much?"

"Wouldn't any of the others tell you? My dear comrades from my own cell?"

All the dear comrades seemed to have taken memory-scrambling drugs, as captured rebels often did, though the director sometimes thought it a superfluous action on their part.

"None of the others offered to act as a double agent." Ahlgren was trying to humor this babbler out of the one piece of valuable information he was likely to possess.

"Our comrades in the contact cell will have heard about the

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arrests this morning," said the prisoner, with a sudden happy thought. "They'll have moved already anyway."

Quite likely true, Director Ahlgren knew. "So it can't hurt them if you tell me," he encouraged.

The prisoner pondered a moment longer, then named an address in a quiet residential section about a mile from the Party Building.

"Anything else you can tell me?"

Careful consideration. "No."

PolPol Chief Lazar and a couple of guards came into the office quickly after the director touched the signal button.

"Take him down to Conditioning," said the director, leaning back in his chair. He felt his head beginning to ache.

The rebel screamed and rolled his head, about the most violent motion he could make, as the two PolPol guards caught him gently by the arms and lifted him from his chair.

"Traitor! You are the traitor, not I! You have betrayed my confidence, your own honor, you — " He seemed suddenly to realize what was going to happen to him. "Conditioning! No, not my mind, not my mind! Can't you beat me or something instead? I won't be meee any lonnnggerrrr . . . "

The screaming died away down the corridor outside the office.

"Careful with him," Lazar called sharply to the guards, from the doorway. "Don't let his legs bump, there. You bruised that man this morning; we want no more of that."

He came back into the office, closing the door, viewing Ahlgren with the proper expression of respect. "Would you like me to conduct the next interview, sir?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"I thought you might feel a certain reluctance, sir. I understand you knew the young lady years ago."

"Before I joined the Party. Yes, quite right, I did." The director arose from his chair and walked toward the wide window, past the bookshelves that almost filled one wall, giving the office the air of a study and concealing his secret exit.

FROM the window he looked out upon the sunset that reddened the sky over his prosperous city where bright lights were coming on against the dusk.

I understand Lazar, he thought, because he is ambitious, as I am, or as I was. Under one of the old dictatorships, I would have had to fear such ambition in a subordinate and consider

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taking steps against him. But I need not fear Lazar, because the Party claims his perfect loyalty, and he can do nothing against me until I begin to fail the Party. And is that time perhaps drawing near? Will my secret exit always be only a private joke?

Watching his own eyes in the half-mirror of the window, the director told himself: Someone must govern the people; someone always has. The worldwide Party does better than the old governments. There are no wars. There is no corruption and no real struggle for power among Party members, because there is practically no disobedience in the carefully chosen ranks. The mass of the citizens seem content with their bread and circuses. There is only the Underground, and maybe some kind of Underground is necessary in any society.

"Lazar."

"Sir?"

"How do we do it? How do we attain such perfection of power that the essence of power is enough, that we have no need to constantly threaten or stupefy the citizens?"

The gay and active city below was now brightening itself against the gathering night. No giant signs proclaimed the glories of the Party. No monolithic statues deified the World Directors, past or present. The Party was invisible.

Lazar seemed a bit shocked at the question. "The selfless obedience of each individual is the life and strength of the Party, sir." A phrase from the catechism.

"Of course . . . but look, Lazar. That Citizens Policeman directing traffic down there. He's probably never even thought of joining the Party. He wears a stun pistol, because of the non-political criminals he must sometimes deal with; but if one of your PolPol agents were to walk up to him and arrest him, the odds are he would offer no resistance. Now why? The Citizens Police are as well armed and I think more numerous than your men."

Lazar studied the traffic cop below through narrowed eyes. "I can't remember when we've had to arrest a Citizens Policeman."

"Neither can I. The point is — how do we do it?"

"Superior dedication and discipline will prevail, sir."

"Yes." But the parroted phrases were no real answer. The Citizens Police were presumably disciplined and dedicated, too. Lazar was unwilling or unable to really discuss the subject.

Such questions had not occurred to Ahlgren himself until recently. He could not remember

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ever seriously considering the possibility of himself opposing the Party in any way, even before that day five years ago when he had been accepted as a member.

"And we of the Party control the means of Conditioning," said Lazar.

"Conditioning, yes." Barbara. He had to fight to keep anything from showing in his face. It was hard.

He knew there was not one person in the gay and bright-lit city before him who could not be brought to the basement of this building at any time, at a word from himself, to undergo Conditioning. The Ultimate Pain, he had heard it called by Party theorists. But it needed no dramatization.

The citizens had a slang term for it that he had heard somewhere: brain-boiling.

The office intercom sounded on the director's desk. "Chief Lazar's office would like him to come in, if possible." Tight security. No details would be spoken unnecessarily over even the director's line. No risks would be taken at all.

He was faintly relieved. "Your office wants you for something; I won't need you here any longer. Good job today."

"Thank you, sir." Lazar was gone in a moment.

AHLGREN was alone in his soft-lit office. His eyes ranged along the bookshelves. The Party put no restrictions on reading. Aquinas — some of the Eastern philosophers — Thomas Paine — Russell. The encyclopedia, with the gap where that one volume had been missing for a week. Volume P. What the devil could have happened to it? Was there a kleptomaniac on his staff? It seemed absurd for anyone to steal an ordinary book.

But he was only procrastinating. He went to sit again at his desk, leafed through papers. Bulky contracts and specifications for the new water supply for his city. And the Citizens Council had voted a new tax; he would have to hire collectors. Too much non-political work, as usual, and now the Underground flaring up again, and —

He keyed the intercom and ordered, "Bring the girl in," without giving himself any more time to think about what he was going to have to do.

He sat waiting, his head aching, trying to hold nerves and face and hands steady. The PolPol report on Barbara was on his desk, mixed up now with the waterworks, and he read it for the hundredth time. She had spoken in public against the Party this morning in the presence of a PolPol officer.

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She came into the office quietly, between the blank-faced uniformed PolPol women. She walked unaided and Ahlgren felt a faint, smothered gladness that it had not been necessary to stun her.

"Leave us," he told the guards, who instantly obeyed. Would it look suspicious for him to want to be alone with another prisoner? It didn't matter — in a few minutes he would send her to Conditioning, because he had to send her; there was nothing else the Party could do with her. He felt his heart sinking.

He met her eyes for the first time and was vastly grateful to see no terror in them.

"Sit down, Barbara."

She sat without speaking and watched him as if more sorry for him than for herself. It was her look of that day years ago, when he had told her of losing a job . . . If I had married her in those days, he thought, as I almost did, and never joined the Party, I would now be sitting in some outer office waiting, desperate to do anything to spare her the Pain, but helpless. Now I sit here, representing the Party, still helpless. But no, if I had married her I would have found some way to keep her from this.

"I'm sorry, Barbara," he said finally. "You know what I must do."

The waiting, unchanging sympathy of her eyes wrenched at him. She had never been beautiful, really, but so utterly alive. . .

"I — would like you to come back when you are—recovered," he heard himself maundering. "You'll be all —"

"Will you be able to marry me then?" Her first words to him burst out in a voice near breaking, like a question held in too long, that she had not meant to speak aloud.

He sat up straight in his chair, feeling as if the world had suddenly shaken beneath him. "How can you ask me that? You know I can't marry — I have chosen the Party!" He gripped the desk to stop his hands from trembling; then he realized that she must be only making a desperate attempt to save herself from Conditioning.

"IN THE name of the Party, sir," said City PolPol Chief Lazar in a hushed and slightly awed voice, shaking the hand thrust toward him by District Director Perkins. They stood in a small room in the basement of the Party Building in Ahlgren's city. One-way glass in a wall showed a view of a Treatment Room where Conditioning was sometimes practiced.

"Lazar. I've studied your record." Perkins' handshake was

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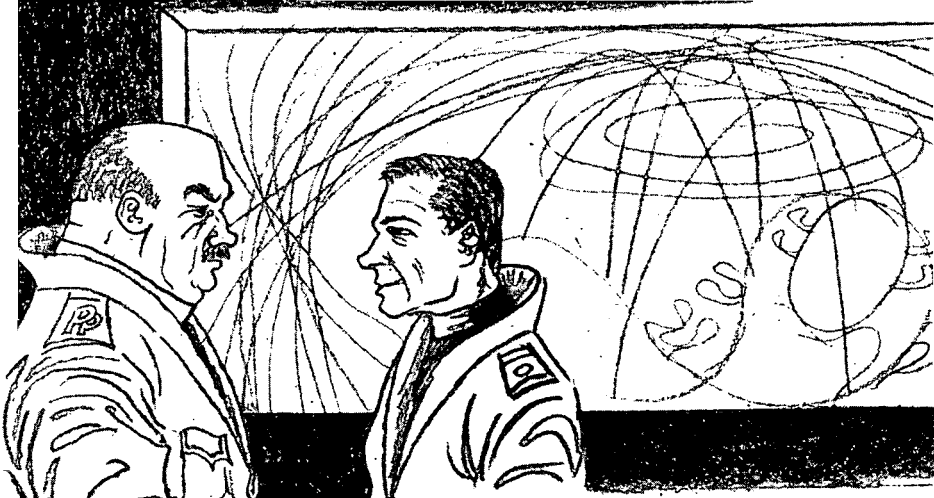

massive, like his bearing. "I think you may be taking over in this city very soon, so I had you called down here to watch something. The doctors called me in the District Capital last night about Ahlgren and we've arranged a little test for him today — he doesn't know I'm here, of course. We should be able to see the climax, if things go as planned."

"I — I hardly know what to say, sir."

Perkins eyed him shrewdly. "Think maybe you're the one being tested? No, son, not today. But it won't hurt you to see this." He frowned. "Ahlgren started out well in the Party, too. Seemed to have a fine future ahead of

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his head.

A door leading to a corridor opened and a man dressed in the green smock of a doctor stuck his head into the room. "Would you mind if I watched from here, sir?"

"No, no, come in. Lazar, this is Citizen Schmidt. Doctor Schmidt, I should say, eh?"

Lazar acknowledged the introduction perfunctorily. A loyal non-Party citizen was neither a political danger nor a competitor for advancement, and therefore almost totally uninteresting.

Lazar turned to study the Treatment Room through the one-way glass. It was not impressive, except for the treatment table in the center, a low monstrous thing of wires and power. There were soft lights, chairs, a desk in one corner, and above the desk a small bookshelf. Lazar could see that one book had been placed behind the others, as if someone had tried to hide it. Looking closer, he made out that it was part of an encyclopedia.

Volume Paa-Pyx.

AHLGREN was holding Barbara by the wrists; he pulled her across the desk and kissed her. His decision had been made with no real struggle at all. Maybe he had made the decision weeks or months ago, without knowing, and had just been traveling with the Party on inertia. Barbara trembled and tried to pull back and then let herself go against him. She was not only acting to save herself now; she could not be.

"They say life can be good again after Conditioning, Barbara," he whispered to her. "They say many regain full normal intelligence. They say — no, I could never send you to that! Not you, not that!"

"Oh, Jim, Jim." Years since anyone had called him by that name. Or was it so long? A half-memory came disturbingly and fled before he could grasp it. But a real memory came plainly to him, bringing with it a plan of action that was at least better than nothing: the memory of the address the young rebel had spoken to his ears alone.

"Listen!" He grabbed Barbara's arm and held her away from him. "There may be one chance, just one small chance for us."

"What?"

"The Underground. I have an address."

"No, Jim. You can't do that." She backed away, looking toward the door as if she heard the guards coming to seize them both.

"Why not? Don't you understand what Conditioning means?

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Don't you understand what you are facing?"

"Yes, but . . ." Indecision showed in her voice and manner. "I don't know if I should try to tell you."

"Tell me what? Don't you realize what you're facing?"

"Yes, but you . . ."

"Me?" So she could think of his welfare first, even while she faced the Ultimate Pain. She must have loved him all these years. "I've had enough of the Party anyway." The words came so easily and sincerely to his lips that he was surprised as if at hypocrisy in himself, but it was not that. Somehow in the past few minutes his whole outlook on the world had shifted abruptly; the change must have been building for a long time.

His mind raced ahead, planning, while Barbara watched his face intently, one hand held up to her mouth.

He pulled a stun pistol out of his desk, checked the charge and thrust it into his belt. "Follow me. Quickly."

A section of the bookcase swung outward at his touch. He led Barbara into the narrow passage in the wall and indicated an unmarked phone set into a small niche. "Private line to District HQ. This may buy us a little time."

She reached out tentatively to restrain him, clenched her fingers and made no objection.

He picked up the phone and waited until he heard someone on the other end, then said: "Ahlgren here. Rebel plot. They've infiltrated. I must flee." He hung up. Of course District HQ would doubt the message, but it should divide at least for a time the energies of the Party that would now be arrayed against him — and against the frightened girl he now led toward the tiny secret elevator that would take them down to street level. In his revolt against the authority he had accepted for so long, he felt less alone than he had for years.

THEY emerged into open air by coming out of the wall in a little-used entrance to a rather shabby apartment house a block from the Party Building, after Ahlgren had studied the glow-panel-lit hallway through a peephole to make sure it was unoccupied.

He had discarded his uniform belt and insignia inside the secret passage; his jacket hid the butt of the pistol in his belt. If no one looked too closely at him, he might pass in the half-dark streets for a plainly dressed citizen.

They walked the side streets toward the Underground address, not going fast enough to

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attract attention. Barbara held his arm and from time to time looked back over her shoulder until he whispered to her to stop it. Other couples strolled past them and beside them; the normal evening life of the city progressed around them as if the Party and the Underground were no more than fairy stories.

The young rebel might have told someone else the address before or after Conditioning had wrenched and battered his mind out of human shape. Ahlgren could not rely on the place being even temporarily safe. Barbara and he could only pause there in their flight, warn any Underground people they could find, and try to flee with them to some place of slightly less danger, if any existed. It was a weak chance, but their only one. There had been no time at all to plan anything better. Rebellion against the Party had burst in Ahlgren with the suddenness of a PolPol raid. His very lack of preparation for this step and his good record to date might make District think for a long time that he was indeed the victim of infiltrating Underground plotters.

The address proved to be that of a middle-sized, unremarkable building in a lower-class residential area, two or three apartments over a quiet-looking small tavern. A single front entrance divided inside, where stairs led up to the apartments and two steps led down to the level of the tavern.

A couple of male patrons looked around from the bar with mild interest as Ahlgren and the girl entered. They and the bartender seemed nothing but solid citizen types.

While Ahlgren hesitated, uncertain of what to say or whether to speak at all, the bartender said suddenly: "Oh, that bunch. They're upstairs." The man's face assumed an unhappy look.

Ahlgren took no time to worry over whether he and Barbara were such obvious rebels already, or how the bartender fitted in. The PolPol might be right on their heels. He only nodded and led Barbara up the stairs.

There were two doors at the top; he chose at random and knocked. No answer. He tried the other. After at least a minute of feverishly quiet rapping on both doors, one opened enough to reveal a thin man with a blank suspicious stare.

"Let us in," Ahlgren whispered desperately. "It is vital to the Underground." The PolPol might close in at any moment; he had to take the chance and speak plainly. His hand was under his jacket on the butt of his stun pistol and his foot was in the door.

"I don't know what you mean,"

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said the thin man tonelessly.

"Look at me! I am the director of this city. I have deserted the Party."

THE man's eyes widened and there were excited whisperings in the room behind him. "Let them in, Otto," said a voice.

Ahlgren pushed his way into the room, dragging Barbara with him. A fat man sat at a table with a bottle and glasses before him, and a little pile of dingy books and folders on the floor at his feet. A pair of unwholesome-looking women sat on a sagging couch along one wall. A door with a homemade look in another wall seemed to lead into the other apartment. Evidently the Underground used the whole second floor.

Ahlgren wasted no time with preliminaries. "Listen to me. The PolPol may be on their way here now. Get out while you can and take us with you. Have you some place to run to?"

The fat man regarded Ahlgren owlishly and belched. "Not so fast. How do we know —"

There was a glare of searchlights against the dirty windows, through the drawn shades, and a booming amplified voice: "Ahlgren, come out peacefully. We know you're there. Ahlgren, come out."

He gripped Barbara and looked into her eyes. "Try to remember me after the Pain."

"Oh, Jimmy, Jimmy, you don't know, you don't understand!"

He dragged her downstairs, seeking a way out of the trap. The PolPol would have the building surrounded, of course, but they would expect him to flee upward, to try to fight them off on the stairs, and perhaps try to escape over the roofs, as rebels often did.

The four Underground people had burst into passionate argument, but were doing nothing purposeful.

The lights were out in the tavern downstairs. The two patrons were standing behind the bar, the attitude of their vague shapes suggesting that they were waiting as interested spectators. The windows here too glared with searchlights, and the barkeep stood in the middle of the room glaring at Ahlgren.

"Ahlgren! Come out peacefully and no one will be hurt! Your case will be fairly heard!"

"Why don't you just do like the man says?" the barkeep suggested angrily.

What was wrong with these people? Didn't they realize — but he had no time.

"Shut up. Where does that back door lead?"

"Nowhere. I keep it locked." The barkeep swore. "Hope they

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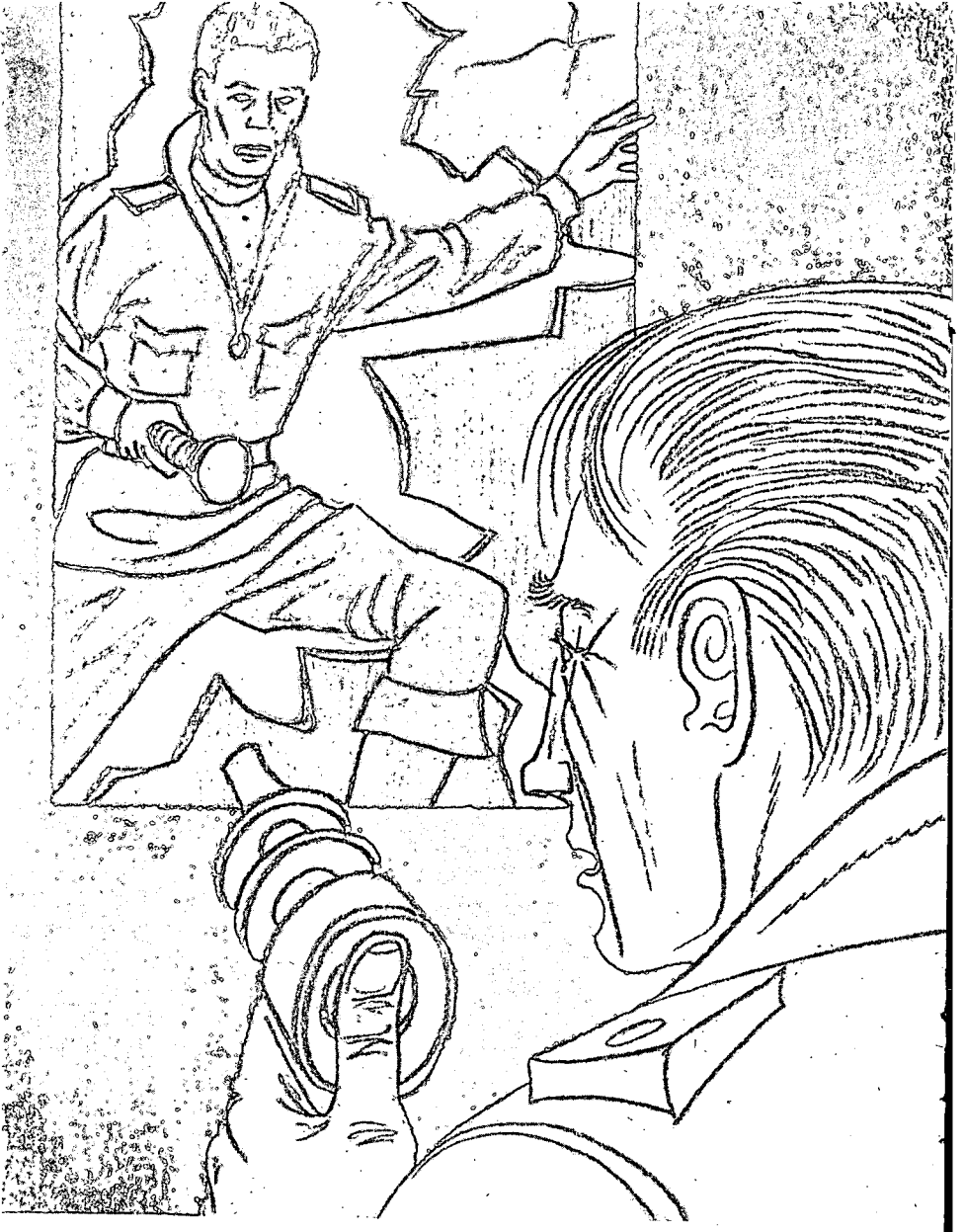

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don't smash the place, but they sure as hell will if you don't go out. Sure, they say, we pay compensation, but look how long it takes. Sure, the glass they put in won't cut nobody, but I gotta sweep it up and put up plywood panels. Why don't you just go out?"

"Take it easy, Sam," said one of the patrons behind the bar, with a chuckle. Barbara was babbling, too, something she was sorry for, or sorry about.

A window smashed in and a PolPol officer stood outlined in the frame, flashlight in one hand sweeping the room. The director shot first. The invisible soundless stun beam doubled up the man; the flashlight spun crazily through the room as he dropped it. Ahlgren picked up a stool to batter at the rear door. It was the only way left.

"That don't go nowhere, I told ya! Stop! Why did I ever sign up?" the barkeep moaned, grabbing at Ahlgren to keep him from smashing at the door with the stool.

Ahlgren let him have the stun beam at close range.

It didn't bother the man in the least.

"Not on *me*, friend not on *me*. Tickle all you want," the barkeep said in obscure triumph, pulling the stool from Ahlgren's grip, which loosened from surprise.

The director felt the paralyzing tickle of a beam stab his own side; he had time to see Lazar grinning in at a window before sinking to the floor and into unconsciousness.

HE WAS slumped in a chair propped up by a stiff pillow when awareness returned. There was a sense of strangeness in his mind that he could not fully account for by what he remembered happening. Drugs? They were seldom used on anyone.

It was a Treatment Room; they were not going to waste any time. Lazar's face looked down at him, grinning, as he had seen it at the tavern window. Two or three of the green-smocked doctors who always administered Conditioning stood beside the monstrous table, watching him and waiting. And Barbara. She stood free in the background, not stunned or restrained in any way.

Lazar caught the direction of his gaze.

"Oh, yes, the young lady has been most helpful to us, future Citizen Ahlgren. It was in large part her idea —"

"Please." The doctor's voice had an edge to it. "I must insist, sir, that you not interfere with treatment."

"Very well." Lazar's grin was wider than ever. He touched Ahl-

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gren's shoulder as one might pat a dog about to be gassed. "I was comfortably set to watch this show when you made me get up and work for it. But it'll be worth the trouble. Good luck in your new life." He went out jauntily.

Ahlgren let his eyelids close; he could not look at Barbara. She was whispering with a doctor. He prayed to the God of his childhood for the Pain to come quickly and bring complete forgetfulness.

A doctor was in front of Ahlgren. "Open your eyes. Look at me. Trust me. Never mind who's watching or that you think you've been betrayed. We didn't plan that, but it can't be helped now. I want you to do something and it won't hurt. Will you try?"

The doctor's eyes burned down. His voice compelled.

Ahlgren was held. "Try what?" he asked.

"What do you think it is I want?" the doctor asked with calm patience. "Try to remember."

Remember? What was there to remember? Ahlgren's eye roved about the room, fell upon the little bookshelf above the desk in one corner, and slid away again. But he supposed there was no escape from — what?

"You can get up now if you like, Jim. Move around."

He tried. His legs pushed him erect. His arms functioned. Surprisingly, he could move; it took an effort but was not painful. How long had he been out from the stunning?

He found himself approaching the little bookshelf, while the doctors and Barbara watched silently. She was crying quietly; too late now. But he couldn't hate her.

OBEYING AN impulse, he reached behind the little row of books and pulled out what he saw with a shock was Volume P.

"Who hid this here?" he demanded. "I've been looking for it."

"Don't you remember, Jim?" asked a doctor gently. "You pushed it back there the last time. Now shall we try reading some things again?"

The sense of strangeness deepened until there was no standard left to judge the strangeness by. That doctor had a cursed familiar way of talking to the director of a city, even an arrested director, but the director opened the book. He would show them; there was no subject he couldn't read about.

He found the place he thought they wanted and began to read aloud, "Pain, the Ultimate," but all that followed was "see Conditioning."

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"No, Jim. Turn further back. Let's try again where we were last time. Do you remember?"

Ahlgren turned pages, suddenly fearful that something was coming that he could not face. Paine, Thomas. Lucky man, bound up safe in a book.

"Party, the?" he asked, looking around at the doctors. He thought he remembered reading this article once; much of it had been only a vague jumble of nonsense. High-priced encyclopedia, too.

"No, we won't try that one today. Turn further back to where we were last time. Remember?"

Ahlgren knew it had to be done. For some reason. His hands began to tremble as he turned the pages. Pe. Pi. He was getting closer to something he didn't want to find.

Po. He dropped the book, but made himself pick it up again. Barbara gave him a violent nod of encouragement. She was still almost crying over something. Women. But this time she was here to help him and he was going to succeed.

He turned a few more pages and there it was. Something he had tried to face before — how many times? — and had always forgotten about after failure. His eyes scanned the clearly printed symbols, but something in his brain fought against interpreting them.

"I can't read it. It's all blurry." He had said that before.

Barbara whispered: "Try, Jim. Try hard."

Ahlgren stared at the page in an immense effort, failed, and relaxed for a moment. The title of the article suddenly leaped into focus for him:

POSSEMANIA

HE HELD up the book and began to read aloud in a quavery voice: " — from the Latin, *posse* power, plus *mania*. Of all mental diseases doubtless the most evil, in terms of the total suffering inflicted upon humanity throughout history; and one of the most resistant to even modern therapy."

Why had they wanted him to read this? Why had it been difficult? An awful idea loomed on the horizon . . .

" 'Unique among diseases in that its effects are put to practical use by society, it in fact forms the basis of modern government (see Party, the).' "

Ahlgren faltered and looked around him uncertainly. He felt sweat beginning to bead his forehead. The article went on to great length, but he flipped pages rapidly back to find Party, the.

He skimmed rapidly through

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a few paragraphs, then read aloud in an impersonal, shrill, hurried tone: " 'Those with this abnormal lust for power over others generally find means to satisfy it in any society; ours is the first to maintain effective control over its members who are so afflicted. Now, the victims of the disease are necessarily detected during the compulsory annual psychological examination. If immediate therapy fails to effect a cure, as it usually does, mental Conditioning is applied to initiate or strengthen the delusions, welcomed by the patient, that the Party has the rest of the citizenry at its mercy and—' "

"Take your time, Jim."

" ' — and that — that Conditioning is a painful and often crippling punishment employed by the Party itself, to erase thoughts of political opposition.' "

The world was turning under Ahlgren. He forced himself to read on slowly and sanely. Could this be truth?

" 'Following what is now to him the only practical course, the victim is guided to apply for Party membership as those found to be compulsive rebels and/or punishment-seekers are shuttled to the complementary organization (see Underground, the). He is of course invariably accepted and assigned, depending on his skills, to the Administration or the Political Police (see PolPol).' "

Again pages fluttered under Ahlgren's fingers. PolPol.

" ' — stun pistols locked at low neural frequencies that produce only a tickling sensation, to which all Party and Underground members are Conditioned to respond by going into psychic paralysis, unless in a situation where it would be physically dangerous to do so — ' "

Ahlgren skipped from article to article, his mind grabbing recklessly at the words that had been forbidden him.

" ' — most people generally ignore the activities of both Party and Underground, except as occasional sources of unexpected amusement — ' "

" ' — Underground members captured by the Party are quickly turned over to the government doctors for Conditioning. They are given treatments and sent out again to a different area, believing themselves rebel couriers or escapees. At each capture they are tested to see if their disease has abated to within the reach of therapy — ' "

" ' — the PolPol raid the same houses over and over, being Conditioned to remember no such addresses and to keep no records of them. Property owners are compensated for damage incurred. Personal injury in these

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cases is of course extremely rare and accidental, when it does occur, due to the Conditioning of both Party and Underground people against it — ' "

" ' — Party members composing the Administration perform most of our essential government functions, being constrained by their Conditioning against any abuse of power, corruption or dishonesty . . . ' "

AHLGREN felt cold sweat all over him. His headache was gone, but his throat felt raw. How long had he been reading aloud?

"That's fine, Jim, that's fine!" a doctor said. "Can you go on a little further?"

It took a giant's effort. Yet it was something that must be done.

" 'By the interaction of Conditioning with the disease, the victim is prevented from apprehending the true state of affairs. He is, for example, unable to read this very article with any true comprehension. If read aloud to him, it will not make sense to his mind; he will interpret it to suit the needs of the moment, then quickly forget it. Indeed, this article, and similar writings, are frequently used as tests to determine a patient's progress. . .' "

Ahlgren's hand holding the book dropped to his side. He stood swaying on his feet, utterly weary. He only wanted sleep, oblivion, forgetfulness.

A doctor carefully took the book from him, found the place, and read: " 'When continued therapy has brought a Party member near the point of cure, as is finally possible in about half of all cases, a realization of the true state of affairs becomes possible for the patient' . . . That's you now, Jim. You're over the hump. Understand me? You're getting well!"

Director Ahlgren was weeping quietly, as if from weakness and exhaustion. He sat down on the edge of the treatment table and the doctors gathered around him and began to fit the attachments of the table to him. He helped them; he was familiar with the process.

"I think this'll be the last, Jim. We're going to de-Condition you this time. Then one more subconscious therapy —" The doctor's voice came through speakers . . .

. . . into the next room, where Perkins, Lazar, and Doctor Schmidt watched and listened.

Lazar stared through the one-way glass, gripped by vast elation. The director's chair was his! The girl in the Treatment Room had thrown her arms about Ahlgren; perhaps she regretted that

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she had been used against him. She should be grateful. It was not often that a mere citizen had such a chance to help the Party.

Doctor Schmidt was saying something to Lazar. "What?"

"I said, would you tell me what you thought of the material the former director read aloud just-now?"

Lazar frowned. Why, it had been something — unpleasant. He turned to Perkins, giving up the problem with relief to his superior.

"What he read was a lot of subversive nonsense," Perkins rumbled, after a thoughtful pause. "It amounted to a confession of guilt."

"I see," said Doctor Schmidt. He looked a little sad. "Thank you, gentlemen. Shall we go?"

Perkins was staring with bright and hungry eyes at the motionless form of former Director Ahlgren on the table.

"Too bad we have to inflict such pain," he said.

HE WAS coming out of pleasant sleep, and the first thing he did was to reach out and find her hand. He looked up at her face. He remembered now — she'd said she'd wait . . . five years before.

"Was it your idea," he asked, "to help last night yourself?"

"No, the doctors suggested it, darling. They thought you were approaching a crisis . . . but it's all right now."

"Then stop crying," he told her. "Every time I look at you, you're crying. Think I want to watch you cry all the time?" But she was half laughing, too, so it really was all right.

He lay in peace. Mountains had been lifted off him.

HIS mother was bending over him anxiously. He saw there was morning light coming into a hospital room.

"Son, are you all right?"

"I'm fine, Mother. No, no pain." Barbara was still there, looking happy.

His father came in, a little older and grayer than he remembered, shaking his head in the familiar way at his mother's ignorant worry about the supposed pain of Conditioning.

"It was on the Party news just now," his father said, grinning. "You were denounced for traitorous activity yesterday and purged last night. The usual appeal — for the citizenry to treat you kindly and not blame your new personality for your acts of treason. I think we can manage that somehow."

Jim Ahlgren looked around at the three of them. He said softly: "I've been gone a long time."

— FRED SABERHAGEN

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THE DRUG

It could be deadly. It had to be tested. But Sales wanted a new product this very minute.

AMOS PARRY, a regional manager for Whelan, Inc. (Farm & Ranch Chemicals & Feeds), had come to work a few minutes early and was waiting in the lab when Frank Barnes arrived. He saw that the division's chief chemist was even more nervous than usual, so he invested a few minutes in soothing small talk before saying, "Frank, Sales is beginning to push for that new hormone."

Immediately, Barnes came unsoothed. "Bill Detrick was on the phone about it yesterday, Mr. Parry. I'm sorry I was abrupt with him."

Amos grinned. "If you were, he hasn't had a chance to men-

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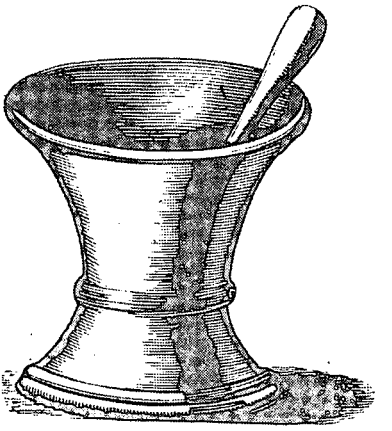
By C. C. MacAPP
Illustrated by MARTINEZ



tion it to me yet. But I think we'd better light a fire under the thing. We'll probably get a blast from Buffalo before long. How many men do you have on it?"

"Well, two helping with routine work, but I've done most of it myself, evenings and weekends. I didn't want anybody to know too much about it. Mr. Parry, I'm worried about it."

"Worried? How do you mean?"

"Well — let me show you the litter we've been testing it on."

The pigs were in pens outside the lab. Amos had seen figures on weight gain and general health (the latter was what promised to be sensational) but hadn't seen the animals for two weeks. He eyed the first bunch. "How old is that boar pig?"

"Not quite four months."

Amos was no expert, but he'd spent many hours on customers' farms and he thought the animal looked more mature than that. So did the shoats in the same pen, though they tended more to fat. All of the group had an odd look, certainly not normal for Yorkshires of their age. He thought of wild hogs. "Is it just the general health factor?" he asked.

"I don't think so, Mr. Parry. You remember I told you this wasn't actually a hormone."

"I know. You wanted to call

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it that for secrecy, you told me."

"Yes, sir, but I didn't tell you what it really was. Mr. Parry, are you familiar with hypnotics? Mescaline, especially?"

"No, I'm not, Frank."

"Well, it's a drug that causes strong hallucinations. This is a chemical derivative of it."

Amos grinned again. "Pipe dreams for hogs?"

He quit grinning as implications struck him. If this thing didn't pan out, after the money they'd spent and the rumors that had seeped out, there'd be some nasty questions from Buffalo. And if it did, and they began selling it . . .

"What would it do to human beings?" asked Amos.

Barnes avoided his eyes. "That's one of the things I'm worried about," he said. "I want to show you another pig."

This one was isolated in its own pen, and it looked even stranger than its siblings. In the first place, its hair was thicker, and black. There was an oddness in its shape and a vaguely familiar sinuousness in the way it moved that made Amos' skin prickle.

"What's wrong with it?" he asked.

"It's healthy except for the way it looks and acts."

"Same litter and dosage?"

"Yes, sir — all of them got just one dose. The effects seem to be permanent."

They were leaning over the fence and the animal was looking up at them. There was an oddity in its eyes; not intelligence exactly, but something unpiglike. Abruptly, it stood up on its hind legs, putting its forefeet against the fence and raising its head toward them. It squealed as if begging for attention. Amos knew that pigs made affectionate pets. Drawn to it as well as repelled, he reached down and patted it, and the squealing stopped.

It was standing too easily in that position, and suddenly Amos recognized what was familiar about it. He jerked his hand away, feeling a strong desire for soap and water. "How long's it been this way?"

"It's changed fast in the last week."

Amos looked toward the doorway of the lab, just inside of which a large black tomcat sat watching them. "Is the cat out here a lot?"

Barnes' eyes went to the cat, widened, and turned back to the pig. He looked as ill as Amos felt.

WHEN Amos got to his office, his sales manager was already waiting. His mind only half present, Amos sized up the stuffed briefcase and the wider-than-

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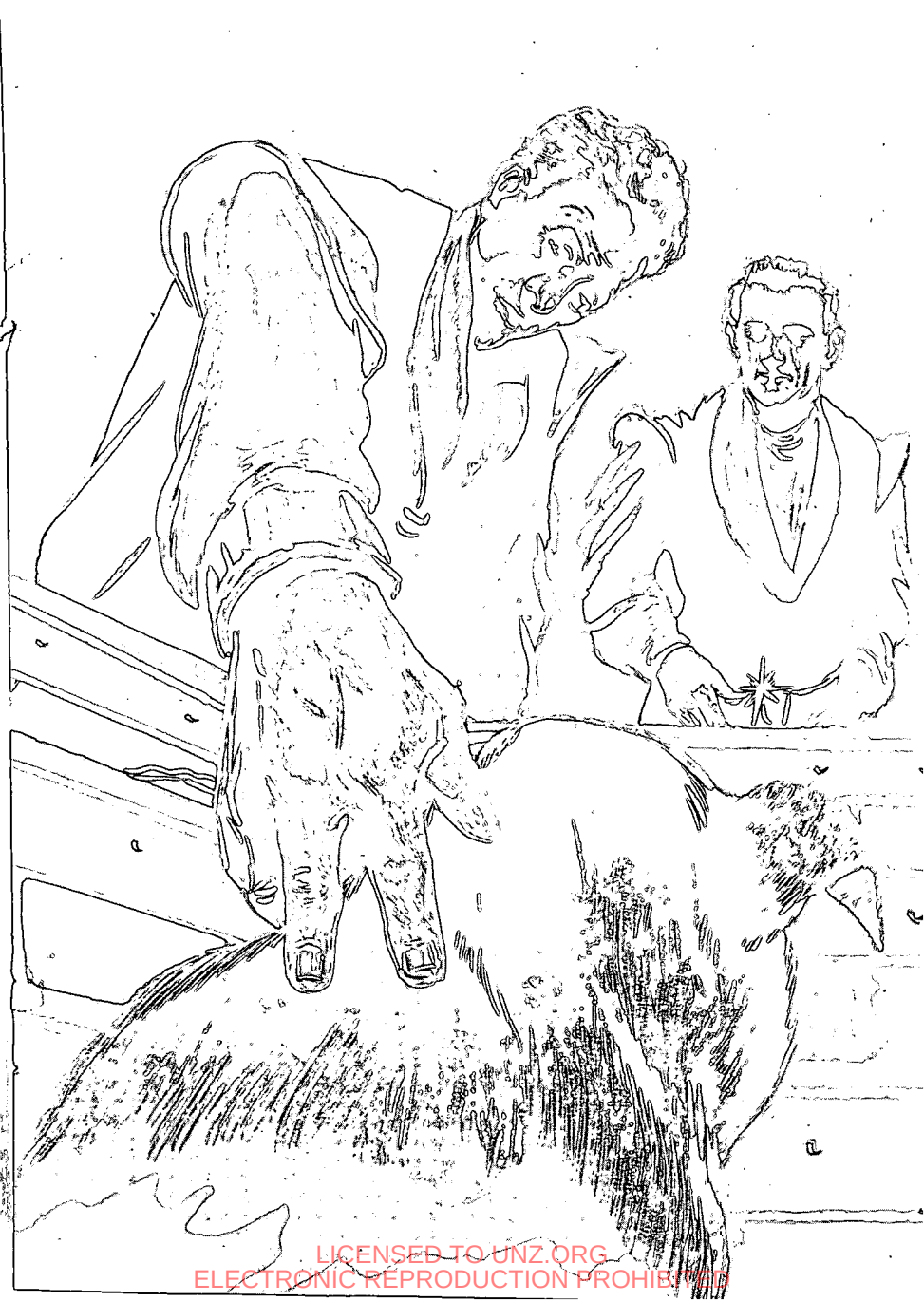

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necessary smile as he responded automatically to the amenities. "Just get back?" he asked.

"Early train. Darned planes grounded again." Detrick looked full of energy, though he'd undoubtedly rushed home, shaved, showered and changed, and hurried to the office with no rest. He sat down, extracted papers from the briefcase, and beamed, "Wrote up the Peach Association."

He'll give me the good news first, Amos thought. "Fine, fine," he said. "The whole year?"

"Yep. Got a check from the Almond Growers, too. All paid up now."

"Good," said Amos, and waited.

It came. "Say, I was talking to Frank Barnes about that new hormone he's got and he seemed a little negative about it. When do you think we can have it?"

It was a temptation to answer with false optimisms and duck the issue for a while, but Amos said, "The slowest thing will be State and Federal testing and registration. I'd say not less than a year."

Detrick nodded. "Competition's selling more and more stuff that's not registered."

"Fly-by-night outfits and they're always getting caught."

Detrick smiled. "Every night they fly away with more business."

Amos managed a smile, though the argument was old and weary. "We'll put it up to Buffalo if you want to, Bill. You know I can't okay it myself."

Detrick dropped the subject, not being a man to beat his head against a stone wall if there were ways around it, and for the next hour Amos had to listen to the troubles: competition had cut prices on this, upped active ingredients in that, put such and such a new product on the market (Whelan's factories and warehouses already groaned under a crippling diversity of products but Sales didn't feel that was *their* problem) and even the credit policies needed revising. But the worst of all was a fifteen-thousand-dollar claim for damage to pear trees, caused by a bad batch of Whelan's arsenical insecticide.

Amos got rid of Detrick with a few definite concessions, some tentative ones, and some stand-offs. He made sure no one was waiting to see him and told his secretary he didn't want to be bothered before lunch.

He had a lunch date with a customer and dreaded it — it meant three or four highballs and overeating and an upset stomach later. Before then, though, he had a few minutes to try to get his mind straightened out. He mixed a glassful of the stuff he was supposed to take

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about now. The Compleat Executive, he thought; with physician and prescription attached. It didn't seem possible that this same body had once breezed through anything from football to fried potatoes.

Mechanically, his mind on the lab's pigs, he got a small bag of grain out of a desk drawer. He hoped nobody (except his secretary, of course) knew he wasted time feeding pigeons, but it helped his nerves, and he felt he had a right to one or two eccentricities.

They were already waiting. Some of them knew him and didn't shoo off when he opened the window and scattered grain on the ledge outside. A few ate from his hand.

It was a crisp day, but the sun slanting into the window was warm. He leaned there, watching the birds — more were circling in now — and looking out over the industrial part of the city. The rude shapes were softened by haze and there was nothing noisy close by. He could almost imagine it as some country landscape.

He looked at his watch, sighed, pulled his head in and shut the window. The air conditioner's hiss replaced the outside sounds.

Not even imagination could get rid of the city for long.

GOING through the outer office, he saw that Alice Grant, his secretary, already had her lunch out on her desk. She was a young thirty, not very tall and just inclined to plumpness. She wore her blonde hair pulled back into a knot that didn't succeed in making her look severe, and her features were well-formed and regular, if plain. Amos noticed a new bruise on one cheek and wondered how long she'd stay with her sot of a husband. There were no children to hold her.

"I'll probably be back late," he said. "Anything for this afternoon?"

"Just Jim at two-thirty and the union agent at three."

The lunch didn't go too badly, lubricated as the customer liked it, and Amos was feeling only hazily uneasy when he got back.

A stormy session with his plant superintendent jarred him into the normal disquiet. Jim Glover was furious at having to take the fifteen-thousand-dollar claim, though it was clearly a factory error. He also fought a stubborn delaying action before giving Amos a well-hedged estimate of fifty thousand to equip for the new drug. He complained that Frank Barnes hadn't given him enough information.

Amos was still trembling from that encounter when the union business agent arrived. The lunch

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was beginning to lump up and he didn't spar effectively. Not that it made much difference. The union was going to have a raise or else. By the time he'd squirmed through that interview, then dictated a few letters, it was time to go home.

He hoped his wife would be out so he could take some of his prescription and relax, but she met him at the door with a verbal barrage. Their son, nominally a resident of the house, had gotten ticketed with the college crowd for drunken driving and Amos was to get it fixed; the Templetons were coming for the weekend; her brother's boy was graduating and thought he might accept a position with Amos.

She paused and studied him. "I hope this isn't one of your grumpy evenings. The Ashtons are coming for bridge."

His control slipped a little and he expressed himself pungently on Wednesday night bridge, after a nightclub party on Tuesday and a formless affair at somebody's house on Monday.

She stared at him without compassion or comprehension. "Well, they're all business associates of yours. I wonder where you think you'd be without a wife who was willing to entertain."

He'd been getting a lot of that lately; she was squeezing the role of Executive's Wife for the last drop of satisfaction. Well, since he couldn't relax with his indigestion there was only one thing to do. He headed for the bar.

"Now don't get tipsy before dinner," she called after him.

He got through the evening well enough, doused with martinis, and the night that followed was no worse than most.

AT NINE the next morning, the call he'd been expecting from Buffalo came through. "Hello, Stu," he said to the president of the company.

"Hello, Amos. Still morning out there, eh? How's the family? Good. Say, Amos; couple of things. This big factory charge. Production's screaming."

"It was definitely a bad batch, Stu."

"Well, that's it, then. Question is, how'd it happen?"

"Jim Glover says he needs another control chemist."

"Hope you're not practicing false economy out there."

"We wanted to hire another man, Stu, but Buffalo turned it down."

"You should have brought it to me personally if it was that important. It's going to take a big bite out of your year's profit. Been able to get your margin up any?"

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Amos didn't feel up to pointing out that Sales wanted lower prices and the union wanted higher wages, so that the margin would get even worse. He described a couple of minor economies he'd been able to find, then mentioned the contract with the Peach Association.

"Yes, I heard about that," said the president of the company. "Nice piece of business. By the way, how you coming on that animal hormone?"

That was the main reason for the call, of course. Detrick had undoubtedly phoned east and intimated that Amos was dragging his feet on a potential bonanza. "I was going to call you on that, Stu. It'll take a year to test and get registered and — "

"Amos, I hope you're not turning conservative on us."

The message was plain; Amos countered automatically. "You know me better than that, Stu. It's the Legal Department I'm worried about. If they set up a lot of roadblocks, we may need you to run interference."

"You know I'm always right behind you, Amos."

That's true, thought Amos as he hung up. Right behind me. A hell of a place to run interference.

He knew exactly what to expect. If he tried to cut corners, the Legal Department would scream about proper testing and registration, Production would say he was pushing Jim Glover unreasonably, and everyone who could would assume highly moral positions astraddle the fence. A ton of paperwork would go to Buffalo to be distributed among fifty desks and expertly stalled.

Not to mention that this was no ordinary product. He realized for the first time that the Government might not let him produce it, let alone sell it. Even as a minute percentage in feeds. If it was a narcotic, it could be misused.

HIS BUZZER sounded, and he was surprised when Mrs. Grant announced Frank Barnes. It was out of character for Frank not to make a formal appointment first.

One look told Amos what was coming. He listened to Frank's resignation with a fraction of his mind while the rest of it mused upon the purposeful way things were converging.

Barnes stopped talking and Amos said mechanically, "You've been part of the team for a long time, Frank. It's especially awkward to lose you just now." It was banal, but it didn't matter; he wasn't going to change the man's mind anyway. He looked closer. The timidity was gone. So were the eyeglasses. A fright-

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ening thought struck him. "You've taken some of that drug."

Barnes grinned and handed a small vial full of powder across the desk, along with a file folder. "Last night," he said. "Between frustration with the job and curiosity about this stuff, I yielded to temptation."

Amos took the vial and folder. "What are these for?"

"So you can destroy them if you want to. I've doctored up the lab records to make the whole thing look like a false alarm. You're holding all that's left of the whole program."

Amos looked for signs of irrationality and saw none. "Do you feel all right?"

"Better than you can imagine. But let me tell you what you're up against. I can at least do that for you, Mr. Parry."

"Thanks. Don't you suppose you could call me Amos now?"

"Sure, Amos. First of all, you were right about that pig trying to imitate the cat. He couldn't do much because he only had a pig's brain to work with." He stopped and grinned, evidently at Amos' expression. "I'll try to explain. What is an animal? Physically, I mean?"

Amos shook his head. "You've got the floor."

"All right. An animal is a colony of cells. Different kinds of cells form organs and do different things for the colony, but each cell has a life of its own, too. When it dies a new one of the same kind takes over. But what regulates the colony? What maintains the pattern?"

Amos waited.

"Part of it's automatic replacement, cell for cell. But beyond that there's a control; and it's the unconscious mind." He paused and studied Amos. "You think I'm theorizing. I'm not. That drug broke down some barriers, and I see all this as you see your own fingers moving."

Amos remembered the mention of hallucinations.

BARNES grinned again. "Let's say it's only one per cent awake and walled off from the conscious mind. What would happen if something removed the wall and woke up the other ninety-nine per cent?"

Remembering the pig, it was impossible not to feel a cold seed of belief. Amos dreaded what was coming next; clearly, it would be a demonstration.

Barnes held out his hand, palm up. In a few seconds a pink spot appeared. It turned red, oozed dismayingly, and became a small pool of blood. Barnes let it stay for a moment, then wiped it off with a handkerchief. There was no more bleeding. "That's something I can do fast," he said. "I

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opened the pores, directed blood to them, then closed them again. Amos, do you believe in werewolves?"

Amos wanted to jump up and shout, "No! You're insane!" but he could only sit staring.

"I could move that thumb around to the other side of my hand," Barnes said thoughtfully. "I'm still exploring, but I don't think even the bone would take too long. You'll notice I don't need glasses any more."

The buzzer buzzed. Amos jumped, and from habit answered. "Bill Detrick and that customer are here, Mr. Parry," came Alice Grant's voice.

"I — ask them to wait," he managed.

His mind was a muddle; he needed time. "You — Frank — will you stay for a few days?"

"Sure. I'm in no hurry now. And while you're thinking, let me give you a few hints. No more cripples or disease. No ugly people, unless they choose to be. And no law."

"No — law?"

"How would you police such a world? A man could change his face at will, or his fingerprints. Even his teeth. Probably he could do things I can't imagine yet."

The buzzer went again, with Mrs. Grant's subtle urgency. Amos ignored it, yet he hardly knew when Frank left the room.

He realized the chemist had done him a favor. The selfish thing would have been to keep the secret and the boon all to himself; instead, he'd given Amos the choice.

But what was the choice? Suppressing the drug would cost him his job. There was no doubt about that.

He was standing with his back to the door when he heard it open. He turned and faced Detrick's annoyed frown. "Amos, we can't keep this man waiting. He's — "

All of Amos' frustration and the new burden coalesced into rage. He ran toward Detrick. "You baboon-faced huckster!" he yelled. "Get out! Get out! I'll tell you when you can come in here!" He barely caught his upraised fist in time.

Detrick stood petrified, his face ludicrous. Then he came to life, ducked out, and pulled the door shut behind him.

Amos waited no longer; if he had to decide, he wanted the data first-hand. He spread out the file Barnes had left him and looked through it for dosages. Apparently it wasn't critical, so he poured a little of the powder into a tumbler, added water and threw it down. There was a mild alkaline taste, which he washed out of his mouth with more

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water. Then he sat down to wait.

A MONOTONE seemed to be rattling off trivia; almost faster than he could grasp it, even though it was in his head and not in his ears: "Paris green/calcium acetoarsenite/beetle invasion Texan cotton/paint pigment/obsolete/should eliminate/compensation claim/man probably faking infection/Detrick likes because we only source/felt like hitting him when we argued about it/correspondence Buffalo last year/they say keep/check how use as poison/damned wife — "

The last thought shocked his intellect awake. "Hey!" Intellect demanded. "What's going on here?"

"Oh; you've broken through," said Unconscious. "That was fast. Fifteen minutes and twenty-three seconds since you drank it. Probable error, one-third second. I've only been awake a few minutes myself. Minute/sixty per hour/twenty-four hours day/days getting shorter/September/have raincoat in car/wife wants new car/raincoat sweats plasticizer/stinks/Hyatt used camphor — "

"Hold up a minute!" cried Intellect.

"You want me to stop scanning?"

"Is that what you're doing? Scanning what?"

"Memory banks, of course. Don't you remember the book we read three years ago? 'Human brain estimated — ' Oh, all right; I'll slow down. You could follow me better if you'd let me grow some permanent direct connections."

"Am I stopping you?"

"Well, not you, exactly. I'll show you." Unconsicous began directing the growth of certain nerve tendrils in the brain. Amos could only follow it vaguely.

"Fear!" screamed a soundless voice. "Stop!"

"What was that?" Intellect asked, startled.

"That was Id. He always fights any improvements, and I can't override him."

"Can *I*?"

"Of course; that's mainly what you're for. Wait till I get these connections finished and you'll see the whole setup."

"FEAR!" shrieked Id. "STOP! NO CHANGE!"

"SHUT UP!" yelled Intellect.

It was strange being integrated; Amos found he was aware on two levels simultaneously. While he responded normally to his external environment, a lightning inner vision saw everything in vastly greater detail. The blink of an eye, for instance, was an amazing project. Even as commands flashed out and before the muscles started to respond,

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extra blood was rushing into the area to nourish the working parts. Reports flowed back like battle assessments: these three muscles were on schedule; this was lagging; that was pulling too hard. An infinitesimal twinge of pain marked some minor accident, and correction began at once. A censor watched the whole operation and labeled each incoming report: trivial, do not record; trivial, do not record; trivial, do not record; worth watching, record in temporary banks; trivial, do not . . .

He felt now that he could look forward to permanent health, and so far he didn't seem to be losing his identity or becoming a moral monster (though certain previously buried urges — toward Alice Grant, for instance — were now rather embarrassingly uncovered). He was not, like Frank Barnes, inclined to slip out of the situation at once. He still felt the responsibility to make the decision.

He carried the vial of powder and the lab records home with him, smuggled them past his wife's garrulity (it didn't bother him now) and hid them. He went out with her cheerfully to visit some people he didn't like, and found himself amused at them instead of annoyed. In general, he felt buoyant, and they stayed quite late.

WHEN they did get home, an urgent message was waiting on the telephone recorder, and it jolted him. He grabbed up the hat and coat he'd just laid down.

"What is it?" his wife demanded.

"I've got to go down to the plant." He hesitated; it was hard to say the words that were charged with personal significance. "The watchman found Frank Barnes dead in the laboratory."

"Who?"

"Frank Barnes! My chief chemist!"

"Oh." She looked at him, obviously concerned only with what effect, if any, it might have on her own circumstances. "Why do you have to get mixed up in it?"

"I'm the boss, damn it!" He left her standing there and ran for the garage.

The police were already at the plant when he arrived. Fred's body lay on the floor of his office, in a corner behind some file cabinets, face up.

"What was it?" Amos asked the man from the coroner's office, dreading the answer he expected.

The answer wasn't the one he expected. "Heart attack."

Amos wondered if they were mistaken. He looked around the office. Things weren't disarrayed

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in any way; it looked as if Frank had simply lain down and died. "When did you find him?" he asked the watchman.

"A little after one. The door was closed and the lights were out, but I heard the cat yowling in here, so I came in to let it out, and saw the body."

"Any family?" one of the city men asked.

"No," said Amos slowly, "he lived alone. I guess you might as well take him to the . . . morgue. When can I call about the autopsy?"

"Try after lunch."

Amos watched them carry Frank away. Then he put out the lights and closed up the laboratory. He told the watchman he'd be around for a while, and went to his office to think.

As nearly as he knew, Frank had taken the drug less than twenty-four hours before he had. Death had come late at night, which meant Frank had been working overtime. Why? And why hadn't he been able to save himself?

"Not logical," his unconscious stated firmly. "He should have felt it coming and made repairs."

"This whole thing's a delusion," said Amos dully, aloud.

"No, it isn't," said a peculiar voice behind him.

He whirled and saw the black tomcat grinning up at him. He gasped, wondering if he were completely insane, but in a flash understanding came. "Frank!"

"Well, don't act so surprised. I can tell that you took some yourself."

"Yes — but how — "

"I thought it would be an easy life and I want to stay around here and watch things for a while. There ought to be fun."

"But *how?*"

"I anesthetized the cat and grew a bridge into his skull. It took five hours to transfer the bulk of my personality. It's odd, but it blended right in with his."

"But — your speech!"

"I've made some changes. I'm omnivorous now, too, not just carnivorous — or will be in a few more hours. I can go into the hills and live on grass, or grow back into a man, or whatever I like."

Amos consulted his own inwardness again. "Is this possible? Can a human mind be compressed into a cat's brain?"

"Sure," said Unconscious, "if you're willing to junk all the excess."

He thought about it. "So you're going to stay around and watch," he said to the cat — no, Frank. "An intriguing idea. My family's taken care of, and nobody'll really miss me."

"Except Alice Grant," said Frank cattily. "I've seen the way

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you look at her. The cat part of me has, I mean. And she looks back, too, when you aren't watching."

"Well," said Amos. "Hm. Maybe we can do something there too."

HIS OWN metamorphosis took a lot longer than five hours; he had a much bigger job of alterations to finish. It was nearly two months before he got back to the plant.

He peered in through the window at Detrick, who'd inherited Amos' old office. Detrick was chewing out a salesman. Amos knew what would be happening now; Detrick's ambitious but unsound expansion would have gotten the division all tangled up. In fact, with his sharp new eyes, Amos could read part of a letter from Buffalo that lay on the desk. It was quite critical of Detrick's margin of profit.

The salesman Detrick had on the carpet was a good man, and Amos wondered if he was to blame for whatever it was about. Maybe Detrick was just preparing to throw him to the wolves. A man could hang on a long time like that, shifting the blame to his subordinates.

The salesman was finally excused, and Detrick sat alone with all the frustration and selfish scheming plain on his face. No, Amos thought, I'm not going to turn this drug loose on the world for a while. Not while there are people like Detrick around.

There were no other pigeons on the window ledge except himself and Alice; the rest had stopped coming when Amos disappeared and the feeding ended. For that matter, they tended to avoid him and Alice, possibly because of the abnormal size, especially around the head, and the other differences.

He noticed that Alice was changing the color of her feet again. Just like a woman, he thought fondly.

"Come on, Pigeon," he said, "let's go somewhere else. This tightwad Detrick isn't going to give us anything to eat."

— C. C. MacAPP

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AN HONORABLE DEATH

FROM THE arboretum at the far end of the patio to the landing stage of the transporter itself, the whole household was at sixes and sevens over the business of preparing the party for the celebration. As usual, Carter was having to oversee everything himself, otherwise it would not have gone right; and this was all the harder in that, of late, his enthusiasms seemed to have run down somewhat. He was conscious of a vague distaste for life as he found it, and all its parts. He would be forty-seven this fall. Could it be the imminent approach of middle age, seeking him out even in the quiet backwater of this small, suburban planet? Whatever it was, things were moving even more slowly than usual this year. He had not even had time to get into his costume of a full dress suit (19th-20th cent.), with tails, which he had chosen as not too dramatic, and yet kinder than most dress-ups to his tall, rather awkward figure — when the chime sounded, announcing the first arrival.

Dropping the suit on his bed, he went out, cutting across the patio toward the gathering room, where the landing stage of the transporter was — and almost ran headlong into one of the original native inhabitants of the

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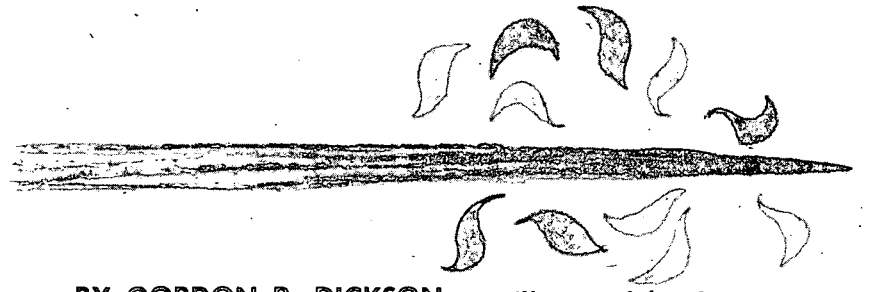
He'd planned Happy Escape Day's celebration with such care. Lucky there was no lawyer — doctor and native chief made trouble enough.



BY GORDON R. DICKSON Illustrated by GAUGHAN

planet, standing like a lean and bluish post with absolute rigidity in the center of the pretty little flagstone path.

"What are *you* doing here?" cried Carter.

The narrow, indigo, horselike face leaned confidentially down toward Carter's own. And then Carter recognized the great mass of apple blossoms, like a swarming of creamy-winged moths, held to the inky chest.

"Oh — " began Carter, on a note of fury. Then he threw up his hands and took the mass of branches. Peering around the immovable alien and wincing, he got a glimpse of his imported apple tree. But it was not as badly violated as he had feared. "Thank you. Thank you," he said, and waved the native out of the way.

BUT THE native remained. Carter stared — then saw that in addition to the apple blossoms the thin and hairless creature, though no more dressed than his kind ever were, had in this instance contrived belts, garlands, and bracelets of native flowers for himself. The colors and patterns would be arranged to convey some special meaning — they always did. But right at the moment Carter was too annoyed and entirely too rushed to figure them out, though he did

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think it a little unusual the native should be holding a slim shaft of dark wood with a fire-hardened point. Hunting was most expressly forbidden to the natives.

"Now what?" said Carter. The native (a local chief, Carter suddenly recognized) lifted the spear and unexpectedly made several slow, stately hops, with his long legs flicking up and down above the scrubbed white of the flagstones — like an Earthly crane at its mating. "Oh, now, don't tell me you want to dance!"

The native chief ceased his movements and went back to being a post again, staring out over Carter's head as if at some horizon, lost and invisible beyond the iridescences of Carter's dwelling walls. Carter groaned, pondered, and glanced anxiously ahead toward the gathering room, from which he could now hear the voice of Ona, already greeting the first guest with female twitters.

"All right," he told the chief. "All right — this once. But only because it's Escape Day Anniversary. And you'll have to wait until after dinner."

The native stepped aside and became rigid again. Carter hurried past into the gathering room, clutching the apple blossoms. His wife was talking to a short, brown-bearded man with an ivory-tinted guitar hanging by a broad, tan band over one red-and-white, checked-shirted shoulder.

"Ramy!" called Carter, hurrying up to them. The landing stage of the transporter, standing in the middle of the room, chimed again. "Oh, take these will you, dear?" He thrust the apple blossoms into Ona's plump, bare arms. "The chief. In honor of the day. You know how they are — and I had to promise he could dance after dinner." She stared, her soft, pale face upturned to him. "I couldn't help it."

He turned and hurried to the landing stage, from the small round platform of which were now stepping down a short, academic, elderly man with wispy gray hair and a rather fat, button-nosed woman of the same age, both wearing the ancient Ionian chiton as their costume. Carter had warned Ona against wearing a chiton, for the very reason that these two might show up in the same dress. He allowed himself a small twinge of satisfaction at the thought of her ballroom gown as he went hastily now to greet them.

"Doctor!" he said. "Lidi! Here you are!" He shook hands with the doctor. "Happy Escape Day to both of you."

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"I was sure we'd be late," said Lidi, holding firmly to the folds of her chiton with both hands. "The public terminal on Arcturus Five was so crowded. And the doctor won't hurry no matter what I say — " She looked over at her husband, but he, busy greeting Ona, ignored her.

THE CHIME sounded again and two women, quite obviously sisters in spite of the fact that they were wearing dissimilar costumes, appeared on the platform. One was dressed in a perfectly ordinary everyday kilt and tunic — no costume at all. The other wore a close, unidentifiable sort of suit of some gray material and made straight for Carter.

"Cart!" she cried, taking one of his hands in both of her own and pumping it heartily. "Happy Escape Day." She beamed at him from a somewhat plain, strong-featured face, sharply made up. "Ani and I — " She looked around for her sister and saw the kilt and tunic already drifting in rather dreamlike and unconscious fashion toward the perambulating bar at the far end of the room. "I," she corrected herself hastily, "couldn't wait to get here. Who else is coming?"

"Just what you see, Totsa," said Carter, indicating those present with a wide-flung hand. "We thought a small party this year — a little, quiet gathering — "

"So nice! And what do you think of my costume?" She revolved slowly for his appraisal.

"Why — good, very good."

"Now!" Totsa came back to face him. "You can't guess what it is at all."

"Of course I can," said Carter heartily.

"Well, then, what is it?"

"Oh, well, perhaps I won't tell you, then," said Carter.

A small head with wispy gray hair intruded into the circle of their conversation. "An artistic rendering of the space suitings worn by those two intrepid pioneers who this day, four hundred and twenty years ago, burst free in their tiny ship from the iron grip of Earth's prisoning gravitation?"

Totsa shouted in triumph. "I knew you'd know, Doctor! Trust a philosophical researcher to catch on. Carter hadn't the slightest notion. Not an inkling!"

"A host is a host is a host," said Carter. "Excuse me, I've got to get into my own costume."

He went out again and back across the patio. The outer air felt pleasantly cool on his warm face. He hoped that the implications of his last remark — that he had merely been being polite in pretending to be baffled by the significance of her costume —

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had got across to Totsa, but probably it had not. She would interpret it as an attempt to cover up his failure to recognize her costume by being cryptic. The rapier was wasted on the thick hide of such a woman. And to think he once . . . you had to use a club. And the worst of it was, he *had* grasped the meaning of her costume immediately. He had merely been being playful in refusing to admit it . . .

The native chief was still standing unmoved where Carter had left him, still waiting for his moment.

"Get out of the way, can't you?" said Carter irritably, as he shouldered by.

The chief retreated one long ostrichlike step until he stood half-obscured in the shadow of a trellis of roses. Carter went on into the bedroom.

HIS SUIT was laid out for him and he climbed into the clumsy garments, his mind busy on the schedule of the evening ahead. The local star that served as this planet's sun (one of the Pleiades, Asterope) would be down in an hour and a half, but the luminosity of the interstellar space in this galactic region made the sky bright for hours after a setting, and the fireworks could not possibly go on until that died down.

Carter had designed the set piece for the finale himself — a vintage space rocket curving up from a representation of the Earth, into a firmament of stars, and changing into a star itself as it dwindled. It would be unthinkable to waste this against a broad band of glowing rarefied matter just above the western horizon.

Accordingly, there was really no choice about the schedule. At least five hours before the thought of fireworks could be entertained. Carter, hooking his tie into place around his neck before a section of his bedroom wall set on reflection, computed in his head. The cocktail session now starting would be good for two and a half, possibly three hours. He dared not stretch it out any longer than that or Ani would be sure to get drunk. As it was, it would be bad enough with a full cocktail session and wine with the dinner. But perhaps Totsa could keep her under control. At any rate — three, and an hour and a half for dinner. No matter how it was figured, there would be half an hour or more to fill in there.

Well — Carter worked his way into his dress coat — he could make his usual small speech in honor of the occasion. And — oh, yes, of course — there was the chief. The native

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dances were actually meaningless, boring things, though Carter had been quite interested in them at first, but then his was the inquiring type of mind. Still, the others might find it funny enough, or interesting for a single performance.

Buttoning up his coat, he went back out across the patio, feeling more kindly toward the native than he had since the moment of his first appearance. Passing him this time, Carter thought to stop and ask, "Would you like something to eat?"

Remote, shiny, mottled by the shadow of the rose leaves, the native neither moved nor answered, and Carter hurried on with a distinct feeling of relief. He had always made it a point to keep some native food on hand for just such an emergency as this — after all, they got hungry, too. But it was a definite godsend not to have to stop now, when he was so busy, and see the stuff properly prepared and provided for this uninvited and unexpected guest.

THE HUMANS had all moved out of the gathering room by the time he reached it and into the main lounge with its more complete bar and mobile chairs. On entering, he saw that they had already split up into three different and, in a way, inevitable groups. His wife and the doctor's were at gossip in a corner; Ramy was playing his guitar and singing in a low, not unpleasant, though hoarse voice to Ani, who sat drink in hand, gazing past him with a half-smile into the changing colors of the wall behind him. Totsa and the doctor were in a discussion at the bar. Carter joined them.

" — and I'm quite prepared to believe it," the doctor was saying in his gentle, precise tones as Carter came up. "Well, very good, Cart." He nodded at Carter's costume.

"You think so?" said Carter, feeling his face warm pleasantly. "Awkward get-up, but — I don't know, it just struck me this year." He punched for a lime brandy and watched with pleasure as the bar disgorged the brimming glass by his waiting hand.

"You look armored in it, Cart," Totsa said.

"Thrice-armed is he — " Carter acknowledged the compliment and sipped on his glass. He glanced at the doctor to see if the quotation had registered, but the doctor was already leaning over to receive a refill in his own glass.

"Have you any idea what this man's been telling me?" demanded Totsa, swiveling toward Carter. "He insists we're doomed. Literally doomed!"

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"I've no doubt we are — " began Carter. But before he could expand on this agreement with the explanation that he meant it in the larger sense, she was foaming over him in a tidal wave of conversation.

"Well, I don't pretend to be unobjective about it. After all, who are we to survive? But really — how ridiculous! And you back him up just like that, *blindly*, without the slightest notion of what he's been talking about!"

"A theory only, Totsa," said the doctor, quite unruffled.

"I wouldn't honor it by even calling it a theory!"

"Perhaps," said Carter, sipping on his lime brandy, "if I knew a little more about what you two were — "

"The point," said the doctor, turning a little, politely, toward Carter, "has to do with the question of why, on all these worlds we've take over, we've found no other race comparable to our own. We may," he smiled, "of course be unique in the universe. But this theory supposes that any contact between races of differing intelligences must inevitably result in the death of the inferior race. Consequently, if we met our superiors — " He gave a graceful wave of his hand.

"I imagine it could," said Carter.

"Ridiculous!" said Totsa. "As if we couldn't just avoid contact altogether if we wanted to!"

"That's a point," said Carter. "I imagine negotiations — "

"We," said Totsa, "who burst the bonds of our Earthly home, who have spread out among the stars in a scant four hundred years, are hardly the type to turn up our toes and just die!"

"IT'S ALL based on an assumption, Cart"—the doctor put his glass down on the bar and clasped his small hands before him — "that the racial will to live is dependent upon what might be called a certain amount of emotional self-respect. A race of lesser intelligence or scientific ability could hardly be a threat to us. But a greater race, the theory goes, must inevitably generate a sort of death-wish in all of us. We're too used to being top dog. We must conquer or — "

"Absolutely nonsense!" said Totsa.

"Well, now, you can't just condemn the idea offhand like that," Carter said. "Naturally, I can't imagine a human like myself ever giving up, either. We're too hard, too wolfish, too much the last-ditch fighters. But I imagine a theory like this might well hold true for other, lesser races." He cleared his throat. "For example,

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I've had quite a bit of contact since we came here with the natives which were the dominant life-form on this world in its natural state — "

"Oh, natives!" snapped Totsa scornfully.

"You might be surprised, Totsa!" said Carter, heating up a little. An inspiration took hold of him. "And, in fact, I've arranged for you to do just that. I've invited the local native chief to dance for us after dinner. You might just find it very illuminating."

"Illuminating? How?" pounced Totsa.

"That," said Carter, putting his glass down on the bar with a very slight flourish, "I'll leave you to find out for yourself. And now, if you don't mind, I'm going to have to make my hostly rounds of the other guests."

He walked away, glowing with a different kind of inner warmth. He was smiling as he came up to Ramy, who was still singing ballads and playing his guitar for Totsa's sister.

"Excellent," Carter said, clapping his hands briefly and sitting down with them as the song ended. "What was that?"

"Richard the Lion-heart wrote it," said Ramy hoarsely. He turned to the woman. "Another drink, Ani?"

Carter tried to signal the baladeer with his eyes, but Ramy had already pressed the buttons on the table beside their chairs, and a little moto unit from the bar was already on its way to them with the drinks emerging from its interior. Carter sighed inaudibly and leaned back in his chair. He could warn Totsa to keep an eye on Ani a little later.

He accepted another drink himself. The sound of voices in the room was rising as more alcohol was consumed. The only quiet one was Ani. She sat, engaged in the single-minded business of imbibing, and listened to the conversation between Ramy and himself, as if she was — thought Carter suddenly — perhaps one step removed, beyond some glasslike wall, where the real sound and movement of life came muted, if at all. The poetry of this flash of insight — for Carter could think of no other way to describe it — operated so strongly upon his emotions that he completely lost the thread of what Ramy was saying and was reduced to noncommittal noises by way of comment.

I should take up my writing again, he thought to himself.

AS SOON as a convenient opportunity presented itself, he excused himself and got up. He went over to the corner where the women were talking.

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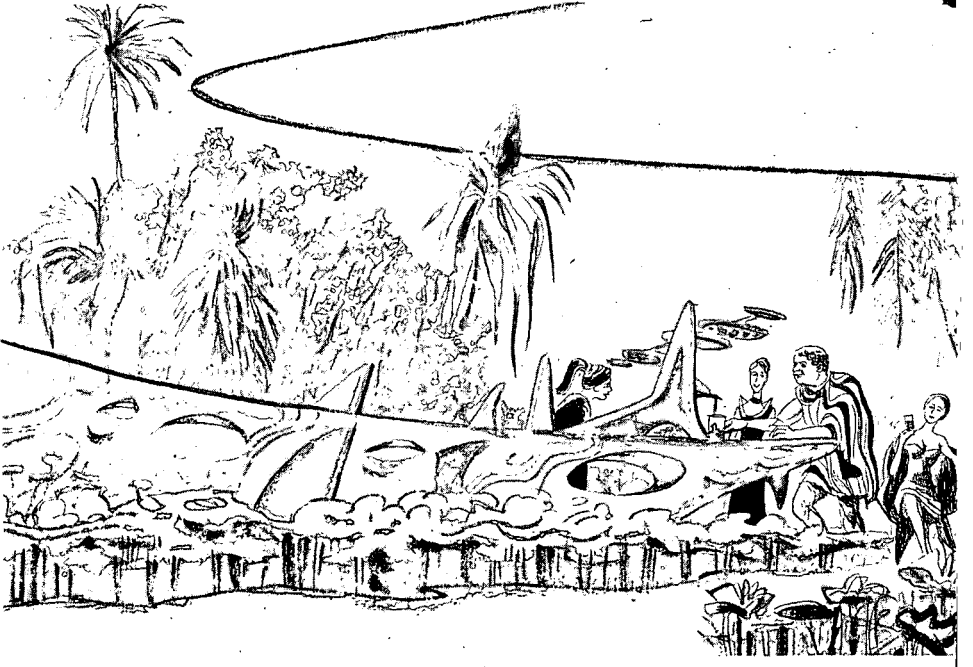

" — Earth," Lidi was saying, "the doctor and I will never forget it. Oh, Cart — " She twisted around to him as he sat down in a chair opposite. "You must take this girl to Earth sometime. Really."

"Do you think she's the back-to-nature type?" said Carter, with a smile.

"No, stop it!" Lidi turned back to Ona. "Make him take you!"

"I've mentioned it to him. Several times," said Ona, putting down the glass in her hand with a helpless gesture on the end-table beside her.

"Well, you know what they say," smiled Carter. "Everyone talks about Earth but nobody ever goes there any more."

"The doctor and I went. And it was memorable. It's not what you see, of course, but the insight you bring to it. I'm only five generations removed from people living right there on the North American continent. And the doctor had cousins in Turkey when he was a boy. Say what you like, the true stock thins out as generation succeeds generation away from the home world."

"And it's not the expense any more," put in Ona. "Everyone's rich nowadays."

"Rich! What an uncomfortable word!" said Lidi. "You should

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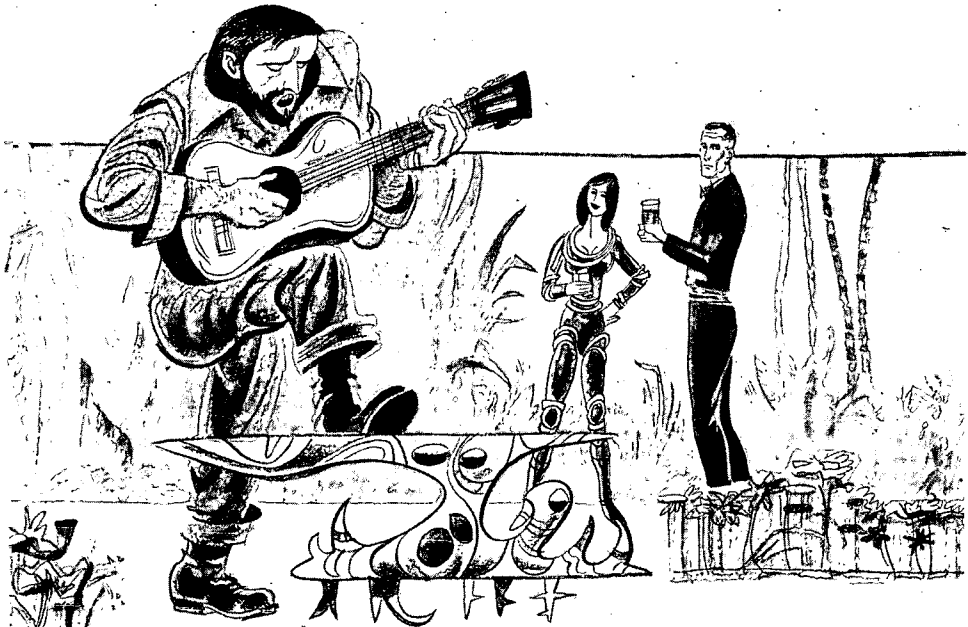

say *capable*, dear. Remember, our riches are merely the product of our science, which is the fruit of our own capabilities."

"Oh, you know what I mean!" said Ona. "The point is, Cart won't go. He just won't."

"I'm a simple man," Carter said. "I have my writing, my music, my horticulture, right here. I feel no urge to roam — " he stood up — "except to the kitchen right now, to check on the caterers. If you'll excuse me — "

"But you haven't given your wife an answer about taking her to Earth one of these days!" cried Lidi.

"Oh, we'll go, we'll go," said Carter, walking off with a good-humored wave of his hand.

As he walked through the west sunroom to the dining area and the kitchen (homey word!) beyond, his cheerfulness dwindled somewhat. It was always a ticklish job handling the caterers, now that they were all artists doing the work for the love of it and not to be controlled by the price they were paid. Carter would have liked to wash his hands of that end of the party altogether and just leave them to operate on their own. But what if he failed to check and then something went wrong? It

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was his own artistic conscience operating, he thought, that would not give him any rest.

THE DINING room was already set up in classic style with long table and individual chairs. He passed the gleam of its tableware and went on through the light-screen into the kitchen area. The master caterer was just in the process of directing his two apprentices to set up the heating tray on which the whole roast boar, papered and gilded, would be kept warm in the centerpiece position on the table during the meal. He did not see Carter enter; and Carter himself stopped to admire, with a sigh of relief, the boar itself. It was a master-work of the carver's art and had been built up so skillfully from its component chunks of meat that no one could have suspected it was not the actual animal itself.

Looking up at this moment, the caterer caught sight of him and came over to see what he wanted. Carter advanced a few small, tentative suggestions, but the response was so artificially polite that after a short while Carter was glad to leave him to his work.

Carter wandered back through the house without returning directly to the lounge. With the change of the mood that the encounter with the caterer had engendered, his earlier feelings of distaste with life — a sort of melancholy — had come over him. He thought of the people he had invited almost with disgust. Twenty years ago, he would not have thought himself capable of belonging to such a crowd. Where were the great friends, the true friends, that as a youngster he had intended to acquire? Not that it was the fault of those in the lounge. They could not help being what they were. It was the fault of the times, which made life too easy for everybody; and — yes, he would be honest — his own fault, too.

His wanderings had brought him back to the patio. He remembered the chief and peered through the light dusk at the trellis under the light arch of which the native stood.

Beyond, the house was between the semi-enclosed patio and the fading band of brilliance in the west. Deep shadow lay upon the trellis itself and the native under it. He was almost obscured by it, but a darkly pale, vertical line of reflection from his upright spear showed that he had made no move. A gush of emotion burst within Carter. He took a single step toward the chief, with the abrupt, spontaneous urge to thank him for coming and offering to dance.

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But at that moment, through the open doorway of his bedroom, sounded the small, metallic chimes of his bedside clock, announcing the twenty-first hour, and he turned hastily and crossed through the gathering room, into the lounge.

"Hors-d'oeuvres! Hors-d'oeuvres!" he called cheerfully, flinging the lounge door wide. "Hors-d'oeuvres, everybody! Time to come and get it!"

DINNER could not go off otherwise than well. Everyone was half-tight and hungry. Everyone was talkative. Even Ani had thrown off her habitual introversion and was smiling and nodding, quite soberly, anyone would swear. She was listening to Ona and Lidi talking about Lidi's grown-up son when he had been a baby. The doctor was in high spirits, and Ramy, having gotten his guitar-playing out of his system earlier with Ani, was ready to be companionable. By the time they had finished the rum-and-butter pie, everyone was in a good mood, and even the caterer, peering through a momentary transparency of the kitchen wall, exchanged a beam with Carter.

Carter glanced at his watch. Only twenty minutes more! The time had happily flown, and, far from having to fill it in, he would have to cut his own speech a little short. If it were not for the fact that he had already announced it, he would have eliminated the chief's dance — no, that would not have done, either. He had always made a point of getting along with the natives of this world. "It's their home, too, after all," he had always said.

He tinkled on a wine glass with a spoon and rose to his feet.

Faces turned toward him and conversation came to a reluctant halt around the table. He smiled at his assembled guests.

"As you know," said Carter, "it has always been my custom at these little gatherings — and old customs are the best — to say a few — " he held up a disarming hand — "a very few words. Tonight I will be even briefer than usual." He stopped and took a sip of water from the glass before him.

"On this present occasion, the quadricentennial of our great race's Escape into the limitless bounds of the universe, I am reminded of the far road we have come; and the far road — undoubtedly — we have yet to go. I am thinking at the moment," he smiled, to indicate that what he was about to say was merely said in good-fellowship, "of a new theory expressed by our good doctor here tonight. This theory

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postulates that when a lesser race meets a greater, the lesser must inevitably go to the wall. And that, since it is pretty generally accepted that the laws of chance ensure our race eventually meeting *its* superior, *we* must inevitably and eventually go to the wall."

He paused and warmed them again with the tolerance of his smile.

"May I say *nonsense!*

"Now, let no one retort that I am merely taking refuge in the blind attitude that reacts with the cry, 'It can't happen to us.' Let me say I believe it *could* happen to us, but it won't. And why not? I will answer that with one word. Civilization.

"These overmen — if indeed they ever show up — must, even as we, be civilized. *Civilized.* Think of what that word means! Look at the seven of us here. Are we not educated, kindly, sympathetic people? And how do we treat the races inferior to us that we have run across?

"I'm going to let you answer these questions for yourselves, because I now invite you to the patio for cognac and coffee — and to see one of the natives of this planet, who has expressed a desire to dance for you. Look at him as he dances, observe him, consider what human gentleness and consideration are involved in the gesture that includes him in this great festival of ours." Carter paused. "And consider one other great statement that has echoed down the corridors of time — *As ye have done to others, so shall ye be done by!*"

CARTER sat down, flushed and glowing, to applause, then rose immediately to precede his guests, who were getting up to stream toward the patio. Walking rapidly, he outdistanced them as they passed the gathering room.

For a second, as he burst out through the patio doorway, his eyes were befuddled by the sudden darkness. Then his vision cleared as the others came through the doorway behind him and he was able to make out the inky shadow of the chief, still barely visible under the trellis.

Leaving Ona to superintend the seating arrangements in the central courtyard of the patio, he hurried toward the trellis. The native was there waiting for him.

"Now," said Carter, a little breathlessly, "it must be a short dance, a very short dance."

The chief lowered his long, narrow head, looking down at Carter with what seemed to be an aloofness, a sad dignity, and suddenly Carter felt uncomfortable.

"Um — well," he muttered,

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"you don't have to cut it *too* short."

Carter turned and went back to the guests. Under Ona's direction, they had seated themselves in a small semicircle of chairs, with snifter glasses and coffee cups. A chair had been left for Carter in the middle. He took it and accepted a glass of cognac from his wife.

"Now?" asked Totsa, leaning toward him.

"Yes — yes, here he comes," said Carter, and directed their attention toward the trellis.

The lights had been turned up around the edge of the courtyard, and as the chief advanced into them from the darkness, he seemed to step all at once out of a wall of night.

"My," said Lidi, a little behind and to the left of Carter, "isn't he big!"

"*Tall,* rather," said the doctor, and coughed dryly at her side.

The chief came on into the center of the lighted courtyard. He carried his spear upright in one hand before him, the arm half-bent at the elbow and half-extended, advancing with exaggeratedly long steps and on tiptoe—in a manner unfortunately almost exactly reminiscent of the classical husband sneaking home late at night. There was a sudden titter from Totsa, behind Carter. Carter flushed.

Arrived in the center of the patio before them, the chief halted, probed at the empty air with his spear in several directions, and began to shuffle about with his head bent toward the ground.

Behind Carter, Ramy said something in a low voice. There was a strangled chuckle and the strings of the guitar plinked quietly on several idle notes.

"Please," said Carter, without turning his head.

There was a pause, some more indistinguishable murmuring from Ramy, followed again by his low, hoarse, and smothered chuckle.

"Perhaps — " said Carter, raising his voice slightly, "perhaps I ought to translate the dance as he does it. All these dances are stories acted out. This one is apparently called 'An Honorable Death.' "

HE PAUSED to clear his throat. No one said anything. Out in the center of the patio, the chief was standing crouched, peering to right and left, his neck craned like a chicken's.

"You see him now on the trail," Carter went on. "The silver-colored flowers on his right arm denote the fact that it *is* a story of death that he is dancing. The fact that they are below the elbow indicates it is an honorable, rather than dishonorable, death.

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But the fact that he wears nothing at all on the other arm below the elbow tells us this is the full and only story of the dance."

Carter found himself forced to clear his throat again. He took a sip from his snifter glass.

"As I say," he continued, "we see him now on the trail, alone." The chief had now begun to take several cautious steps forward, and then alternate ones in retreat, with some evidence of tension and excitement. "He is happy at the moment because he is on the track of a large herd of local game. Watch the slope of his spear as he holds it in his hand. The more it approaches the vertical, the happier he is feeling — "

Rami murmured again and his coarse chuckle rasped on Carter's ears. It was echoed by a giggle from Totsa and even a small, dry bark of a laugh from the doctor.

" — the happier he is feeling," repeated Carter loudly. "Except that, paradoxically, the line of the absolute vertical represents the deepest tragedy and sorrow. In a little paper I did on the symbolism behind these dance movements, I advanced the theory that when a native strikes up with his spear from the absolute vertical position, it is because some carnivore too large for him to handle has already downed him. He's a dead man."

The chief had gone into a flurry of movement.

"Ah," said Carter, on a note of satisfaction. The others were quiet now. He let his voice roll out a little. "He has made his kill. He hastens home with it. He is very happy. Why shouldn't he be? He is successful, young, strong. His mate, his progeny, his home await him. Even now it comes into sight."

The chief froze. His spear point dropped.

"But what is this?" cried Carter, straightening up dramatically in his chair. "What has happened? He sees a stranger in the doorway. It is the Man of Seven Spears who — this is a superstition, of course — " Carter interrupted himself — "who has, in addition to his own spear, six other magic spears which will fly from him on command and kill anything that stands in his way. What is this unconquerable being doing inside the entrance of the chief's home without being invited?"

The wooden spear point dropped abruptly, almost to the ground.

"The Man of Seven Spears tells him," said Carter. "He, the Man of Seven Spears, has chosen to desire the flowers about our chief's house. Therefore he has taken the house, killing all within

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it — the mate and the little ones — that their touch may be cleansed from flowers that are his. Everything is now his."

THE SOFT, tumbling sound of liquid being poured filled in the second of Carter's pause.

"Not too much — " whispered someone.

"What can our chief do?" said Carter sharply. The chief was standing rigid with his head bent forward and his forehead pressed against the perfectly vertical shaft of his spear, now held upright before him. "He is sick — we would say he is weeping, in human terms. All that meant anything to him is now gone. He cannot even revenge himself on the Man of Seven Spears, whose magic weapons make him invincible." Carter, moved by the pathos in his own voice, felt his throat tighten on the last words.

"Ona, dear, do you have an antacid tablet?" the doctor's wife whispered behind him.

"He stands where he has stopped!" cried Carter fiercely. "He has no place else to go. The Man of Seven Spears ignores him, playing with the flowers. For eventually, without moving, without food or drink, he will collapse and die, as all of the Man of Seven Spears' enemies have died. For one, two, three days he stands there in his sorrow; and late on the third day the plan for revenge he has longed for comes to him. He cannot conquer his enemy — but he can eternally shame him, so that the Man of Seven Spears, in his turn, will be forced to die.

"He goes into the house." The chief was moving again. "The Man of Seven Spears sees him enter, but pays no attention to him, for he is beneath notice. And it's a good thing for our chief this is so — or else the Man of Seven Spears would call upon all his magic weapons and kill him on the spot. But he is playing with his new flowers and pays no attention.

"Carrying his single spear," went on Carter, "the chief goes in to the heart of his house. Each house has a heart, which is the most important place in it. For if the heart is destroyed, the house dies, and all within it. Having come to the heart of the house, which is before its hearth fire, the chief places his spear butt down on the ground and holds it upright in the position of greatest grief. He stands there pridefully. We can imagine the Man of Seven Spears, suddenly realizing the shame to be put upon him, rushing wildly to interfere. But he and all of his seven spears are too slow. The chief leaps into the air — "

Carter checked himself. The

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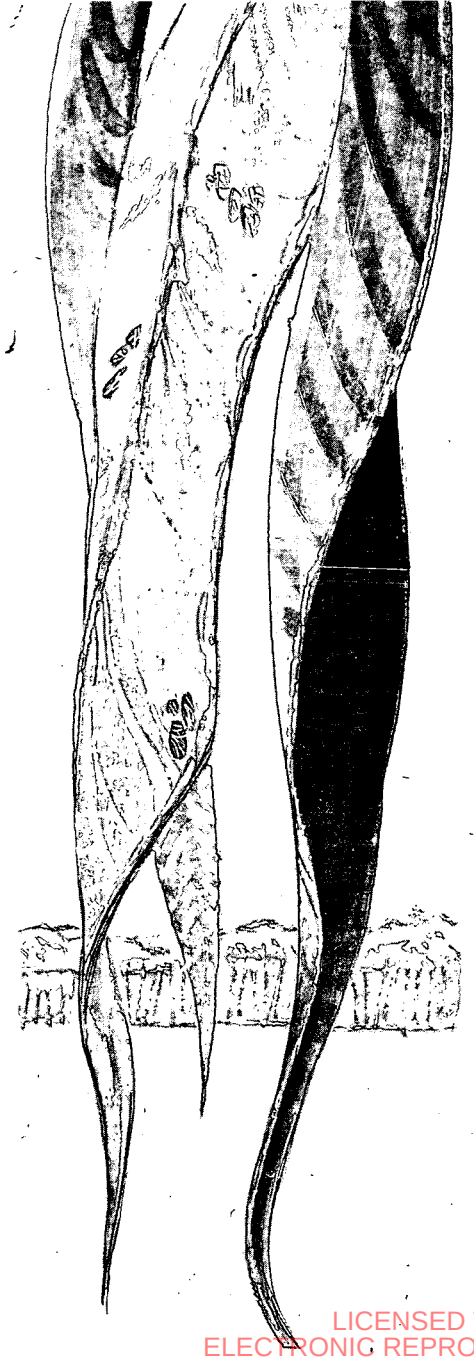

chief was still standing with his forehead pressed against the spear shaft.

"He leaps into the air," repeated Carter, a little louder.

And at that moment the native *did* bound upward, his long legs flailing, to an astonishing height. For a second he seemed to float above the tip of his spear, still grasping it — and then he descended like some great, dark, stricken bird, heavily upon the patio. The thin shaft trembled and shook, upright, above his fallen figure.

MULTIPLE screams exploded and the whole company was on their feet. But the chief, slowly rising, gravely removed the spear from between the arm and side in which he had cleverly caught it while falling; and, taking it in his other hand, he stalked off into the shadows toward the house.

A babble of talk burst out behind Carter. Over all the other voices, Lidi's rose like a half-choked fountain.

" — absolutely! Heart failure! I never was so upset in my life — "

"Cart!" said Ona bitterly.

"Well, Cart," spoke Totsa triumphantly in his ear. "What's the application of all this to what you told me earlier?"

Carter, who had been sitting

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stunned, exploded roughly out of his chair.

"Oh, don't be such a *fool!*" He jerked himself away from them into the tree-bound shadows beyond the patio.

Behind him — after some few minutes — the voices lowered to a less excited level, and then he heard a woman's footsteps approaching him in the dark.

"Cart?" said his wife's voice hesitantly.

"What?" asked Carter, not moving.

"Aren't you coming back?"

"In a while."

There was a pause.

"Cart?"

"What?"

"Don't you think — "

"No, I don't think!" snarled Carter. "She can go to bloody *hell!*"

"But you can't just call her a fool — "

"She *is* a fool! They're all fools — every one of them! I'm a fool, too, but I'm not a stupid damn bloody fool like all of them!"

"Just because of some silly native dance!" said Ona, almost crying.

"Silly?" said Carter. "At least it's something. He's got a dance to do. That's more than the rest of them in there have. And it just so happens that dance is pretty important to him. You'd think they might like to learn something about that, instead of sitting back making their stupid jokes!"

His little explosion went off into the darkness and fell unanswered.

"Please come back, Cart," Ona said, after a long moment.

"At least he has something," said Carter. "At least there's that for him."

"I just can't face them if you don't come back."

"All right, goddammit," said Carter. "I'll go back."

THEY returned in grim fashion to the patio. The chair tables had been cleared and rearranged in a small circle. Ramy was singing a song and they were all listening politely.

"Well, Cart, sit down here!" invited the doctor heartily as Carter and Ona came up, indicating the chair between himself and Totsa. Carter dropped into it.

"This is one of those old sea ballads, Cart," said Totsa.

"Oh?" asked Carter, clearing his throat. "Is it?"

He sat back, punched for a drink and listened to the song. It echoed out heartily over the patio with its refrain of "*Haul away, Joe!*" but he could not bring himself to like it.

Ramy ended and began another song. Lidi, her old self

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again, excused herself a moment and trotted back into the house.

"Are you really thinking of taking a trip Earthside — " the doctor began, leaning confidentially toward Carter — and was cut short by an ear-splitting scream from within the house.

Ramy broke off his singing. The screams continued and all of them scrambled to their feet and went crowding toward the house.

They saw Lidi — just outside the dark entrance to the gathering room — small, fat and stiffly standing, and screaming again and again, with her head thrown back. Almost at her feet lay the chief, with the slim shaft of the spear sticking up from his body. Only, this time, it was actually through him.

The rest flooded around Lidi and she was led away, still screaming, by the doctor. Everyone else gathered in horrified fascination about the native corpse. The head was twisted on one side and Carter could just see one dead eye staring up, it seemed, at him alone, with a gleam of sly and savage triumph.

"Horrible!" breathed Totsa, her lips parted. "Horrible!"

But Carter was still staring at that dead eye. Possibly, the thought came to him, the horrendous happenings of the day had sandpapered his perceptions to an unusually suspicious awareness. But just possibly . . .

Quietly, and without attracting undue attention from the others, he slipped past the group and into the dimness of the gathering room, where the lights had been turned off. Easing quietly along the wall until he came to the windows overlooking the patio, he peered out through them.

A considerable number of the inky natives were emerging from the greenery of the garden and the orchard beyond and approaching the house. A long, slim, fire-hardened spear gleamed in the hand of each. It occurred to Carter like a blow that they had probably moved into position surrounding the house while the humans' attention was all focused on the dancing of their chief.

His mind clicking at a rate that surprised even him, Carter withdrew noiselessly from the window and turned about. Behind him was the transporter, bulky in the dimness. As silently as the natives outside, he stole across the floor and mounted onto its platform. The transporter could move him to anywhere in the civilized area of the Galaxy at a second's notice. And one of the possible destinations was the emergency room of Police Headquarters on Earth itself. Return, with armed men,

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could be equally instantaneous. Much better this way, thought Carter with a clarity he had never in his life experienced before; much better than giving the alarm to the people within, who would undoubtedly panic and cause a confusion that could get them all killed.

Quietly, operating by feel in the darkness, Carter set the controls for Police Headquarters. He pressed the Send button.

Nothing happened.

He stared at the machine in the impalpable darkness. A darker spot upon the thin laquered panel that covered its front and matched it to the room's decor caught his eye. He bent down to investigate.

It was a hole. Something like a ritual thrust of a fire-hardened wooden spear appeared to have gone through the panel and into the vitals of the transporter. The machine's delicate mechanism was shattered and broken and pierced.

— GORDON R. DICKSON

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

FORECAST

April's a triple-treat month for us, with a line-up that includes Fritz Leiber, J. T. McIntosh *and* Theodore Sturgeon . . . not to mention half a dozen or so other top-ranking science-fiction writers who have given us stories with excitement and impact. (Sorry, but we can't tell you just now who the others are—depends on how the type sets, as always.)

The Leiber is a beautiful short job. Leiber says we don't have to go to the stars for aliens. He says the aliens are right here among us—licking their paws and living their secret lives—and he says it in *Kreativity for Kats.*

McIntosh's yarn is *I Can Do Anything,* and that's exactly what his hero can do. The trouble starts when he has to prove it . . . and does.

Then we come to the Sturgeon—*Tandy's Story*—and the only thing that can be better than being able to tell you this one is coming up in April is to be able to tell you (which we can!) that this is only the first of many. You'll love Tandy, a perfectly charming little girl who loves to build doll-houses.

But not for dolls.

What else? Well, a great deal else (Poul Anderson, Frederik Pohl, Frank Herbert, Mack Reynolds, Jack Vance and just about everybody else is in inventory), but as mentioned we can't yet be sure just which. We're sure of Willy Ley, of course. And we're sure of the other regular features. And we're surest of all that April's a month you shouldn't miss!

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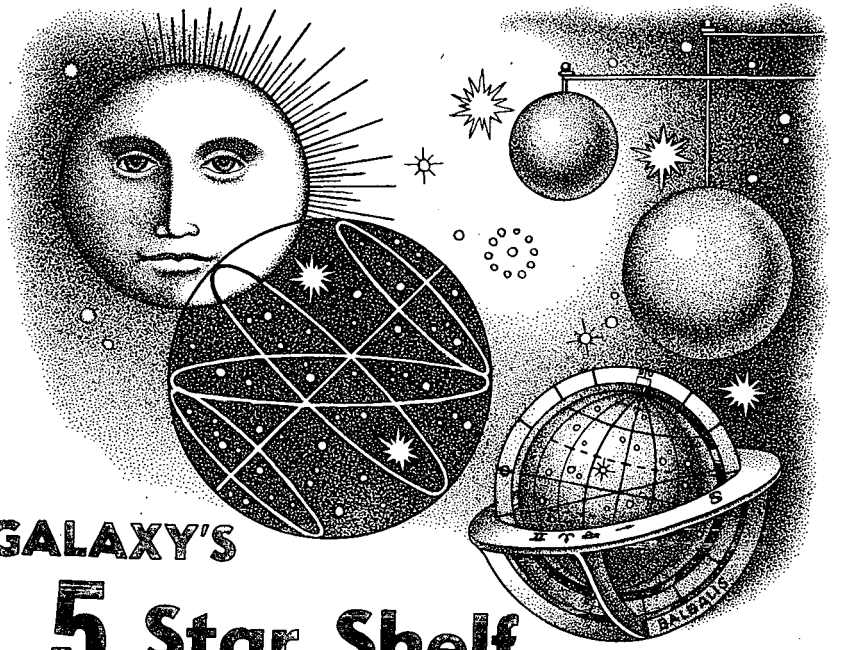

GALAXY'S 5 Star Shelf

A CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ by Walter M. Miller, Jr. J. B. Lippincott Co., Phila., $4.95

MILLER'S ORIGINAL *F&SF* material was an effective evocation of a post-nuclear world. Based on a seeming gag situation, a monastic order devoted to the blind salvaging of written knowledge by an obscure electronics technician, Isaac Leibowitz, the story far transcends the humor of incongruity.

The expanded novel deals with three historical eras, spaced 600 years apart, that delineate the role of the monastery in the slow climb back to comprehension of the sacred circuit diagrams and fragmentary mathematical texts.

Practically all SF stories dealing with religious themes have been top-drawer, written with a careful eye toward perfection because of their controversial nature. Miller's belongs at the very top of the top. It has many passages of remarkable power and deserves the widest possible audience.

Rating: *****

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NEXT DOOR TO THE SUN by Stanton A. Coblentz. Avalon Books, N. Y., $2.95

SF HAS evolved enormously since the early Thirties. Today's best compares favorably in sheer writing with most of the best mainstream efforts. But Coblentz's work still suffers from the crudity, creakiness of plot and poor characterization that marked his early work.

His two young spacemen, investigating the lost Mercurian colony 500 years after the Hydrogen Wars have devastated Earth, refer to each other *ad nauseum* as "Old fellow; old pal; old chap; old chum; old sport" or "old duck" in dialogue and plot a half cut above Tom Swift or the Rover Boys.

Rating: **

FROM GALAXIES TO MAN by John Pfeiffer. Random House, N.Y., $4.95

PFEIFFER'S PROSE is reminiscent of the poetry of Carson's *The Sea Around Us*. By unfailingly choosing the most dramatic and communicative effect, his story of the gigantic sweep of the evolution of galaxies and life is as gripping as a novel.

"We exist in an enormous near-nothingness, a universe which just barely falls short of complete emptiness."

"Information contained in a set of genes is enormous. Compared with Nature's feat of cramming messages into DNA molecules, engraving the Lord's Prayer on the head of a pin is sky writing."

And wonder of wonders, "Sex appears early in the history of life. It has even been observed in bacteria."

LEVEL 7 by Mordecai Roshwald. McGraw Hill Book Co., Inc., N.Y., $3.75

GOVERNOR ROCKEFELLER of N.Y. has gone on record advocating bomb shelters for the common man. Roshwald's book is an extension of this idea of escape into a grave. Although the theme has been done to death in SF, the subject book is a clinical study of the psychology of the principals involved in modern push-button warfare.

The nominal hero (no name—just Push-Button Officer X127) has received training exclusively for the purpose of pushing the buttons required for retaliation against attack. He and three other PBX officers are the reason for "Level 7," a complex of 500 souls, 4400 feet underground,

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completely self-sustaining and equipped to last 500 years without surface contact.

All are buried for life, whether or not they are called upon to button push, in this safest of all possible shelters. The story of the adjustment of X127 and his male and female companions to their strange life has the weird unreality and impact of the too intense reality.

Rating: ****½

THE UNPLEASANT PROFESSION OF JONATHAN HOAG by Robert A. Heinlein. Gnome Press, Hicksville, N.Y., $3.50

THE TITLE story, a long novella from *Unknown,* vintage 1942, should shock present-day Heinlein lovers with a brand of fantasy-mystery they would never associate with him.

Hoag, though well-heeled, has no idea of his profession or daytime activity. A doctor tosses him out in horror after analyzing the filth from under his fingernails. A husband-wife detective team, retained by him to uncover his alter ego, become ensnared in impossible happenings, the distaff half losing her soul in escrow to an organization called the Sons of the Bird. They walk through mirrors.

Fantasy always reads silly in synopsis, doesn't it? But Heinlein's skill makes his ding-dong story credible. Several free bonuses also: "They," "He Built a Crooked House," "All You Zombies," "Our Fair City" and the wonderfully titled "The Man Who Traveled in Elephants" round out this delightful book.

Rating: ****½

HANDBOOK FOR SPACE TRAVELERS by Walter B. Hendrickson, Jr. Bobbs, Merrill, Inc., Indianapolis, $3.95

AUTHOR HENDRICKSON claims that his book "may be helpful even after you become a spaceman." This is indisputably so since it is cram-packed with all manner of information from rocket design to escape velocities of the planets.

However, to let the punishment fit the crime, I recommend that either he or his proofreader be marooned on Triton: "Triton is 2,800 miles in diameter. It is 220 miles from Neptune." "Titan is 3,500 miles in diameter. It is 1,200 miles from Saturn." "The satellite farthest from Uranus is Oberon, 365,000 miles distant. It circles Uranus in an orbit 900 miles above that planet."

Even worse, "The reefs in the solar system have practically all

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been *chartered* (my italics) from Earth."

The list of Bloopers is disheartening long. What if the Pentagon had not "checked the manuscript and given it an intensive going-over in the interests of both accuracy and security"?

THE EXPLORATION OF SPACE, edited by Robert Jastrow. The Macmillan Co., N.Y., $5.50

ROUND-TABLE discussions, questions and answers and technical papers, as presented at the April 1959 Washington Symposium on Space Physics, make up the daunting-looking pages of the book. However, there is more than enough clear text for even the layman to realize that this is the stuff on which dreams are made.

The names: Whipple, Newell, Kuiper, de Vacouleurs, Shapley, Maenzel, etc., etc. The subjects: every field which touches on the book's title (first used by Arthur C. Clarke).

An exciting, up-to-the-stars, down-to-Earth volume.

WHEN THE KISSING HAD TO STOP by Constantine FitzGibbon. W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., N.Y., $3.95

ENGLAND UNDER the heel of Russian communism is hardly a virgin theme. However, Fitzgibbon is concerned with cause rather than effect, with the events that might conceivably lead to a Russian coup.

Unfortunately for comfort of mind, his logic is based on close-fetched possibilities — a general election in which almost all elected candidates run on an Anti-Nuclear-Bomb platform. Committed to disarmament, the new government must force the U. S. to dismantle all air- and rocket-bases and evacuate all troops.

Key officials can then unlock the Trojan gates, first to a Russian Inspectorate, then to police forces, called by the government to help quell an internal disturbance.

As for story plotting, there are a romantic triangle, a quadrangle, a tragic interracial affair, a homosexual, a working-stiff nobleman, a Jewish banker turned Catholic, but not a single individual on which to hang reader-identification.

Rating: ***

THE MATHEMATICAL RECREATIONS OF LEWIS CARROLL, 2 vols. Dover Publications, New York, $1.50 each volume.

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DOVER'S EXCELLENT paperback series of notable reprints is enriched by the above exercises and puzzles by the most famous Oxford Don of all. It joins priceless reproductions of some of the most famous works of Mankind: Newton's *Opticks,* Descartes's *Geometry,* Galileo's *Dialogues, Einstein on Relativity,* etc., etc. Each book is a beauty, sewn binding, fine paper and clear typography.

THE STORY OF CHEMISTRY by Georg Lockemann. Philosophical Library, N. Y., $4.75

A MORE apt title would be *The History of Chemistry,* for this is not narrative in style or intent. Rather, it is a concentrated encyclopedia of chemical events and personae. Some nine hundred names stucco its pages, each with complete chronology.

For the average layman, the book is a rubble of names and dates, but for the specialist or information seeker, it is a rich vein of lore.

INVADERS FROM RIGEL by Fletcher Pratt. Avalon Books, N. Y., $2.95.

EVEN WHEN I first read the magazine version as a lad back in '31, the story seemed utterly improbable. On rereading, I have to revise my estimate utterward.

Rigellian invaders wipe out all but a selected few humans by intensive radiation which converts flesh to metal and turns the survivors into wonderfully fabricated mechanisms. *Machina ex deus,* sort of.

But the Rigellians behave with unbelievable stupidity and the metal humans with their built-in stiff upper lips are too flip and glib, considering that only forty-odd Americans survive the holocaust.

Pratt's reputation rests secure on much better ground than this bog.

Rating: **

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY FILM CHECKLIST by Walter W. Lee, 2519 Armacost Ave., Los Angeles, Calif., $2.00

THE ABOVE is "an attempt to list *all* feature-length SF and Fantasy motion pictures released up to time of publication." Release date, scenarist, stars and other pertinent information are offered.

Appreciation is due Lee for his labor-of-love compilation. Order direct.

— FLOYD C. GALE

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THE CHASERS

By DANIEL F. GALOUYE

Illustrated by Harrington

Civilizations must make sense somehow. But was this one the gaudy, impossible exception?

AS THE dust drifted clear of the ship's landing skids, at least two things became obvious:

One — although they had missed the city (if that's what it was) by miles, they had nevertheless managed to slam down near one of the numerous rural estates.

Two — the landscape would be crawling with Zaortian Fuzzy Tails for a long while to come. They were still pouring out of hatches sprung open by the crunching impact.

Kent Cassidy untangled himself from the control column and plucked one of the Fuzzy Tails from his neck. The creature scampered around until it found the ruptured hatch, then scurried through to join the squealing zoological exodus.

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"There goes ten thousand credits' worth of cargo," groaned Gene Mason. His stout form was slumped in dejection before the view port.

Cassidy sniffed the refreshing air that was drifting into the ship. "Any idea where we are?"

"After the directional stabilizer blew, we made three blind jumps, all in the direction of Galactic Center. We could be *anywhere* between Zaort Seven and the Far Rim."

"Hey, look," said Cassidy.

From the hatchway, the sumptuous estate sprawled nearby, its many gabled manor closed off behind a high wire fence. Cassidy squinted, but failed to recognize the bold, flowing architectural style.

A small, bent figure clung to the wire netting of the fence. He was shouting at the ship, but his excited words were no match for the decompression hisses of the auxiliary drive.

"Humanoid?" Mason suggested.

"Human, I'd say." Cassidy gestured toward the gear locker. "Better break out the translator."

In baggy trousers and sagging blouse, the man raced back and forth behind the fence — the picture of frustrated anger. However, large, doleful eyes, complemented by a bald head and huge, pendulous ear lobes, belied his furious actions.

Presently the squeals of the Fuzzy Tails trailed off in the distance and the auxiliary drive quieted with a final sigh. And now the native's shouts rang out distinct and loud:

"Quick! From here get you! Shoo! Scram! Or out there I'll come and apart tear you!"

"It's English!" Mason exclaimed.

"Of a sort. Archaic, but understandable. And not at all friendly."

Mason scratched his blunt chin. "Guess we're not too far off the beaten star paths, eh?"

Cassidy could find no grounds for challenging this observation as they started down the ladder — not until he looked overhead and saw three suns shining in the same sky. As far as he knew, there were no settled trinary systems.

Beyond the fence the native, a wisp of a man was still fuming. "The hell away from here get! You I'm warning — no closer come!"

Mason displayed a half frown. "He's sure a sour cuss."

"You stay with the ship," said Cassidy. "I'll see what's fouling his tubes."

BEFORE Cassidy reached the fence, his pet Fuzzy Tail came scampering from behind a bush. It clambered up his

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trousers and wrapped itself around his neck. This encouraged the speculation that perhaps the shipment of Tails could be bartered for repairs to the stabilizer — *if* there was a local space technology, and *if* they could corral the animals.

The native grew even more frenzied now as Cassidy drew up before him.

"Trespasser! Back get! *My* property this be! Scram! You I'll kill!"

The Fuzzy Tail uncoiled itself from around Cassidy's neck. Perching on his shoulder, it fussed back at the native in chirping, excited tones. It not only acted at times as though it owned Cassidy, but it also exercised a personal responsibility for his welfare.

"Quiet!" Cassidy snapped out.

It caught both the Fuzzy Tail and the old man by surprise. The animal bounded for cover while the native rocked back on his heels.

"Be you not just a — *little bit* afraid?". His eyebrows mounted the wrinkled expanse of his forehead.

The nearby hedge rustled and parted to let through a dark-haired girl whose tanned skin suggested accustomed exposure to the multiple sunlight. Wearing a belted tunic that lacked inches of reaching her knees, she confronted the old man calmly.

"It's all about what, Papa?" she asked, with a trace of an amused smile.

"Trespassers! On *our* property, Riva! The alarm sound! Scat! To the woods take! Or a dead duck you be!"

"Now, Papa," she chided. Then, through the fence, "Him you musn't mind. It's only his duty he's attending to."

From the distance, Cassidy had suspected the man was of Terran descent. Now, with Riva in the picture, he was certain this world was stocked either by intent or accident with true humans.

"We're from Terra," he said.

She frowned. "Ter-ra?"

"Earth. The original world — "

Incomprehension flooded her even features. But her confusion was only temporary. "Let's play."

It seemed like an altogether acceptable suggestion, Cassidy thought, eying the attractive girl. But he went on, "This is our ship and — "

"Ship?" Then she chased away her puzzlement with a sudden smile. "Some nice games I know."

There was no space technology on this planet, Cassidy decided. They'd be strictly on their own as far as repairing the directional stabilizer was concerned.

By this time Papa, his eyes

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focused afar, had exploded again. "Charge!" he roared. "After him! Wa-hoo! Away don't let him get!" He was gripping the fence and straining toward the field.

Cassidy turned and saw, in the distance, a skimmer vehicle floating along several feet off the ground. In full pursuit was a shouting youth who paused occasionally to seize a rock and hurl it at the craft.

The old man turned toward his daughter. "A good chase that be. Bet he wins."

"Not a chance." The girl frowned. "That be Nedal. Not so swift is he. Loses interest too quick, he does."

She surveyed Cassidy. "Be you a chaser?"

"No, but I could do with a couple of stiff shots."

This drew Papa's attention back to the matter at hand. "Trespassers! The road hit! Scat! Some dust kick up!"

"Quiet!" Cassidy shouted. "Will you listen a minute? I — "

Two loyal Fuzzy Tails came charging up to the fence and added their raucous chatter to Papa's screeching diatribe, which had continued unchecked despite Cassidy's loud, desperate plea.

In the next instant, though, it seemed that a dam had burst overhead. Materializing from nowhere, at least a ton of water poured down on the agile-tongued native, the two Fuzzy Tails, Riva and Cassidy himself, bringing an abrupt end to all the commotion.

The animals streaked for the safety of the bushes while Papa and the girl dived back through the hedge. Bedraggled, Cassidy headed for the ship, wondering what sort of meteorological quirk he had encountered.

"NO, SIR," he said some time later as he attacked the directional selector with pliers and a screwdriver, "I don't like the setup. I don't like it worth a damn."

Mason traced the power lead to the junction box beside the hatch. "Maybe they aren't *all* like that."

"In this sort of place, chances are that the first people you run into are typical. I'm afraid — "

"Say!" Mason interrupted, staring outside. "Look at this!"

Cassidy went over to the hatch and watched a dozen or so men sprinting across the field, their voices rising in excited waves. A lithe young woman was in full flight before them. But she was screaming in delight as she turned now and then to beckon them on. One overtook her and brought her down with a waist tackle. She rebounded to her feet, however, and took off again.

Two of the pursuers collided

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and sprawled on the ground. They sprang up and tore into each other. Unconcerned with the personal dispute, the chase struck off in a new direction, heading toward the ship as it paralleled one of the nearby fenced-in estates.

Behind the wire mesh, a burly young man came charging down the main steps of the manor and raced along with the others.

"That be the way!" he yelled encouragement. "Her go get! It's gaining you are! Hurry!"

He drew up in time to avoid crashing into the side fence, then stood there watching the chase recede in the distance.

Within a hundred feet of the ship, one of the men fell out of the group, panting. He squinted at the vessel, then crept forward, circling to the right. Within arm's reach, he walked back and forth alongside the hull, giving it a close inspection. Finally he paused and fumbled with his clothes.

Cassidy started. "Look what he's doing!"

"Against the side of the ship, too!" said Mason.

Hearing them, the native jerked his head up toward the hatch, then backed off for a better view.

"Stinkers!" he yelled, shaking his fist. "Out here come and fight! Take you both on I can!"

When they only gaped, he whirled and sped off to rejoin the chase.

"You see?" said Cassidy. "Now what do you think?"

"I think we'd better get that directional stabilizer working."

IT TOOK more than an hour to locate the trouble. "The rectifier circuit's shot," Cassidy said finally. "But maybe we can patch it up. Some of the amplifiers I suppose we can do without. But a hyper-oscillator we've got to have."

"Say, you're doing it too," said Mason.

"What?"

"Talking like the natives."

Cassidy looked up. "Guess it's something that grows on you. Well, what do we do now?"

"Maybe the natives can help us."

"If they don't even know where they're from, they probably left their volts and amps behind too. But that's only an assumption."

"In that case," Mason said with a sigh, "there's only one thing left to do — take Riva up on her invitation to, ah, play."

"Funny," Cassidy grunted, heading for the hatch.

"I was only joking."

"I'm not. If we can get in that house, we'll know for sure whether or not they've developed electronic devices."

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Halfway across the field, they were almost run down by the laughing girl and her retinue of galloping suitors, if that's what they were. She was a well-proportioned blonde whose wind-frothed tresses suggested a nymph in flight.

At the fence, they were confronted by Riva, who smiled up at Cassidy and said, "You I was just going to come and get. Ready to play yet you are?"

He looked away and cleared his throat. "Not quite, Riva. We'd like to visit your house."

"It's some interesting games I know. Enjoying them you'd surely be." Her smile, revealing even teeth that contrasted ruddy cheeks, was as persistent as her intent on playing.

Staring at the girl, Cassidy wrestled with a pang of wistful envy over the Olympian life he had witnessed thus far on this world. Maybe they were all irresponsible and childlike. But was that bad?

MASON pointed in alarm toward the meadow in front of the next estate. An ominous-looking, furry thing, supported on six or eight spindly legs, was racing across their field of vision.

"Hurt you he won't," the girl assured them, noticing their apprehension. "Nothing to be afraid of there is."

"*What* is it?" Cassidy was still trying to determine whether it was an overgrown spider or a dry-land octopus.

"Look!" Mason exclaimed. "It's on a leash!"

And Cassidy noticed the thong that extended from the creature to the human who was running along behind it.

"To Wolruf he belongs," the girl explained. "One of them I can get for you too — if you want."

Her slender hand reached out through the fence and tugged at Cassidy's sleeve. "To chase me wouldn't you like?" she asked, pouting.

Glancing behind her, Cassidy spotted the girl's father bearing down on them in a sprint that was nothing short of phenomenal for his age. He began shouting with the last few strides and was in full lung when he hurled himself at the fence. "Git! Out! Away! I'll — "

Riva moved back and glanced overhead and Papa, seeing some hidden significance in her gesture, lowered his voice.

"You I'll tear into and apart I'll rip!" he went on in a menacing whisper. "Your limbs I'll scatter like — "

"Papa, it's not afraid of you they are."

"They're *not?*" He was disappointed.

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"The house they want to come in and see."

He began working up a rage again, but caught himself and looked up into his daughter's face: "Mean you — *my* house they want to see?"

When she nodded Papa seized the lowest strand of wire and lifted the fence high enough for Cassidy and Mason to crawl under. "Why, arranged it can be, I think."

Its architectural prominences rendered shadowless in the trisolar light, the manor was even more imposing close at hand. Of stone construction, it flaunted millwork and beams whose rich carvings would have been welcome on any mansion in the known Galaxy.

Mounting the steps, Mason observed, "Nice little layout they've got here."

Riva moved closer to Cassidy. "Inside is cozy," she said behind a coy smile. "Play we can *really* in there."

Papa had been at the door for some time, fumbling with the lock. In a burst of impatience, he drew off and gave it a solid kick. Then he went back and tried rattling the handle. After a while there was a click and it swung open.

Cassidy followed him into a blaze of iridescent color and unfamiliar form. The huge, circular room was like a vast diorama and it was impossible to tell exactly where the solid objects blended in with the jumbled geometric pattern of the wall.

He walked across a carpet of undulant fibers that reached well above his ankles. And he tripped across a padded, Z-shaped slab that protruded from the wall but slithered into a U and retracted as soon as it received the burden of his weight.

Laughing, Riva helped him up and he paused for a closer visual inspection of his outlandish surroundings. Objects of weird shapes and unguessable purposes hung from the ceiling, some changing form and size as he watched. Scattered about were articles of furniture (he guessed) that resembled giant starfish supported at their centers and extremities by coiled springs. Only, each arm was shaped like a trough that ran into the bowl-like central depression of the piece.

A GLEEFUL scream sounded behind them and Papa went tearing by. With a running leap, he landed on an arm of one of the starfish. Its supporting spring contracted under the weight, then catapulted him ceilingward. When he came down again, it was on an arm of another starfish, then another.

The fourth collapsed, deposit-

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ing him on the floor, and its spring went twanging across the room. Struggling to his feet, he staggered into something resembling a clothes tree, knocked it over and sprawled beside it.

He roared with delight as he snapped the stem of the thing across his knee and hurled the pieces at the ceiling. They scored direct hits on one of the bulky objects suspended overhead and it came crashing down with a twinkling roar amid a shower of sparks.

"Yow-ee!" he exuberated. "So much fun I never had!"

Riva helped him up. "Papa, it's control yourself you must. The last time — remember?"

But he only shook her off and went bounding through an archway. His hectic progress through the house was punctuated by sounds of crashing destruction.

"Honestly," Riva said, spreading her hands, "what to do with him I don't know."

Cassidy continued staring in the direction the old man had gone. "He's wrecking the place!"

"That he is," she admitted sighing. "And such a nice joint it be, too."

"He's just plain nuts!" said Mason.

Riva smiled. "But it's so much fun he has."

Cassidy moved away to get a better view of a silvery gray screen set in the wall and flanked by twin rows of dials and knobs.

"You got stereovision, Riva?" he asked.

Mason went over and twisted several of the controls until a soft light began suffusing the screen.

"Ster-eo-what?" the girl asked.

"Video, television — pictures with sound."

Her face brightened. "Pictures we got — sounds too. Right in that little window."

Just then Papa, uninhibited as ever, came storming back into the room with a lusty "Ya-hoo!" He lost his footing and crashed against the screen. Sparks shot out and the picture that was beginning to take shape faded into obscurity.

"It that settles, Papa!" Riva said, exasperated. "Outside I'm going and for what happens to you I'm not responsible!"

At the door, she paused and smiled at Cassidy. "It'll have to be out there that we play, but no less fun will we have. Put on my best *cavorting* clothes I'm going to."

Mason turned the knobs again, but produced nothing more than the smell of burning insulation and a few snickers from Papa.

"At least," Cassidy observed, "they evidently do know something about electronics. All we have to do now is run down one

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of the technicians and we might get the parts we need for the stabilizer."

OUTSIDE Mason dropped down on the steps and sat with his shoulders slumping. "Damnedest thing I've ever seen," he mumbled.

Cassidy paced to the edge of the porch and stared out over the field. A monstrous skimmer craft appeared in the distance, floating over toward what seemed to be a pile of trash in front of one of the estates. Twin beams of crimson light darted from the nose of the vehicle and played over the mound. In seconds, the heap had melted away and the skimmer floated on.

Wolruf was still walking his octopus-spider pet. There were now two packs of youths out chasing girls. And another skimmer car was having no difficulty surviving the stone-throwing assault of not one, but two dedicated pursuers. Outside of that, Cassidy noted, things appeared quite normal.

Mason slapped his thighs and rose. "You go see if Riva knows how we can contact the authorities. I'm going back and stay with the ship."

Cassidy watched him crawl under the fence, then went around the side of the house. When he caught sight of the girl, she was just disappearing into a smaller structure that might have been a guest house or garage.

Following, he knocked on the door and called out her name anxiously.

"To play are you ready?" There was an eager note in her voice as it came through the panel. "In come on. It's all set I'll be in a jiffy."

He turned the knob, stepped half into the room, lurched back outside and slammed the door behind him. *"Riva!"*

The door started to open, then closed again as the girl laughed. "Oh, all right. Funny you be. It's to play you want, don't you?"

He assured her that he did and added, "But there's something we have to talk about now, Riva."

"Talk, talk, talk. And it gets you where? Only wastes time, it does."

A moment later the door opened and she stood there smiling, with legs apart and hands on her hips. But he hardly had time to react to the skimpiness of her halter and skirt.

"Now," she urged as she sprang up on her toes and kissed him full on the lips, "like a chaser make! To the races we're off!"

With that, she whirled and went streaking through the next room.

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HE SURVEYED his surroundings. It was an ordinary bedroom with conventional furnishings — perhaps a bit crude even for a culture without any space technology. But, then, it didn't seem uncharacteristic, considering the circumstances.

Recognizing the contrast between this guest house and the manor, he frowned as he started off in search of the girl. A worrisome suspicion dogged his thoughts — there had to be sense to Riva and her father and this sumptuous estate, natives who made sport of chasing skimmer craft and voluptuous women when they weren't otherwise indiscreetly occupied. But what?

In the kitchen, he discovered Riva's shapely leg protruding from behind a cabinet. He suspected the exposure was not as accidental as she wanted him to believe. He was certain of that when, as he seized her ankle, she crawled out laughing.

Now she stood before him, unsmiling and impatient, and her slender arms reached out for his shoulders.

"Riva, this is serious!" He forced her hands down again. "I'm in trouble. I need help."

"It's to help you I've been trying all along."

"I've got to get in touch with the authorities — your government."

She looked blank.

He simplified it, "Your leaders."

"Oh, it's easy that is. There be Aline and Clio and Leah and — but that Leah! It's the cake she takes! Thirty chasers she led on the best drag-out of all. Two whole days it lasted!"

"No, Riva! Not *that* kind of leader. I mean — well, someone who get things done. The kind who gets behind things and — "

"That be Leanc. Behind those floating cars he's getting all the time. And how he can throw so many rocks I'll never know!"

He mussed his hair in frustration, then composed himself. "How do I get to the city?"

"That crowded place with all the big houses?" When he nodded, she went on, "It's never been there I have. *Now* we play?"

He drew in a hopeless breath. "All right. Now we play. You go hide."

She radiated a warm eagerness as she initiated the game all over again with a kiss and then went sprinting toward the front of the house. He watched her disappear through the next room, then went out the nearest door, heading for the fence and his ship beyond. It had required no small degree of restraint not to go racing off after her.

At the corner of the manor he was bowled over by a shouting

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Papa who was in full flight as he shot out around a hedge, heading for the guest house.

"All your fault it is!" he cried, recovering his balance and plunging on. "You it be who caused this! that I'll remember!"

Cassidy sat up, arms resting on his updrawn knees, and stared after the old man.

"Ow! Riva! Ouch!" Papa clutched his rear as he neared the cottage. "Help! Oh, my aching back!"

CASSIDY found Mason frozen in the shadow of the ship, fascinated by another girl chase that was in progress nearby.

The swirl of action swerved toward him and Mason tensed, shifting from one foot to the other. With the wind pressing her clothes in revealing tightness about her, the flaxen-haired sprite swept past and he lunged for her.

"Mason!" Cassidy shouted.

"Seemed like a good idea," Mason explained, checking himself. "Wonder what it takes to get in on that chase."

Cassidy forced a fetching thought of Riva out of his mind. "What we ought to be wondering is how soon we can blast off."

"But if we get spaceborne before the stabilizer's working, we'll only be floundering around again."

Cassidy started for the ladder. "There's one thing we *can* do — patch up the hatches and jump over to another spot on this planet. Maybe we'll find somebody who's normal, at least."

But Mason caught his arm and pointed toward Riva's estate where a skimmer car was now parked on the side of the manor opposite the guest house.

"Anybody who can drive one of those things," he suggested, "must know something about the city and how to get there. Maybe he'll even give us a lift."

MASON circled the skimmer craft. "It's a fine piece of workmanship," he said in admiration.

"I'll say," Cassidy agreed. "If we can find out where that was made, I'm sure we'll — "

His vision was suddenly cut off by a pair of hands that came around his head from behind and clamped themselves over his eyes. If he had any doubt as to the identity of their owner, it was soon cleared up by a soft voice next to his ear:

"Not right this is. It's chasing *me* you're supposed to be."

"Riva," he said, facing her, "we'd like to meet the person who came here in that skimmer."

"Excuses, excuses," she complained. "Always something more important than a chase it is."

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"Take us to the driver of that thing," Mason prompted. "We — "

But he tensed and stared up in alarm toward the field. Cassidy followed his gaze to the skimmer vehicle that had earlier reduced a pile of trash to nothing. The craft was just now floating up to their ship.

Its two beams of sizzling red light swept over the hull from stem to stern, again and again — until there was nothing left of their ship but incandescent molten metal.

Mason displayed a sickened, then resigned expression, thrust his hands in his pockets and shuffled off toward the field.

"Getting in on one of those chases I think I'll be," he said.

But he paused outside the fence, turned to say something, then lurched back. "Cassidy! Watch out! There's one of those things!"

The spider-octopus came into view from around the rear of the manor and crawled leisurely toward the guest house. Its body, covered with a multitude of eyes and an unkempt mat of fuzz, was like a coal-black knob perched atop hairy stilts.

Evidently, Cassidy guessed as he dived behind a hedge and pulled the girl with him, the thing had gotten away from its master, for it was trailing its leash in the dust.

"It's hurt you he won't," Riva assured, quite puzzled over his apprehension. "He belongs to — "

But Cassidy clamped a hand over her mouth.

The thing reached the guest house and made a queer noise in front of the door.

Papa came outside on the double.

The spider-octopus picked up the other end of the thong and clamped its braceletlike device around the old man's wrist.

Grinning, Papa pulled toward the gate, straining at the leash.

Eventually, Cassidy was aware of Riva's smiling, inquisitive face in front of his.

"Play?" she invited.

And, glancing back at the charred remains of his ship, he didn't see why not.

— DANIEL F. GALOUYE

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The game of life hadn't quite been played out — it still had that last little catch in it.

AUTO-DA-FE

By DAMON KNIGHT

Illustrated by RITTER

THE king of the world sat on a balcony, listening to the wind blow around his tower. He was drunk. He would get drunker still, and then he would be sick, and the dogs would take care of him. By tomorrow afternoon, he would be drunk and sick again.

The dog Roland lay near his feet — not quite near enough for a kick. The man felt his patient gaze like an itch, like the scab of an ill-healed wound that he could not scratch.

He glanced down at the dog, and saw the grizzled fur above the great bloodshot eyes, the

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hanging dewlaps, the yellow teeth. You're old too, my lad, he thought with bitter satisfaction. You won't last another century.

Dogs and men, they all died eventually. The dogs lived five hundred years at most; all the art of their masters had not been able to give them more. But the race of dogs was not finished yet; the race of man was.

There were fifty-nine dogs left, fifty-eight females, one male.

There was one man, who could call himself the king of the world, or the Dalai Lama, or anything he liked, because there was no one left to dispute the honor with him. No one to talk to; no one to remember.

He was nine thousand and some odd hundreds of years old. Long ago, in the first fraction of that life-span, he had been given the organic catalysts that slowed down the process of maturity and decay almost to zero . . . not quite. At the age of one thousand, he had been a man of thirty, at two thousand, not quite forty. The golden years of full maturity, full powers, were multiplied until it had seemed they would never end.

But the years of decay were multiplied too. He had been a very old man for over a millennium. For a thousand years he had been dying.

The dogs kept him alive. They tended the machines, served him, did the work he was too feeble to do. The clever dogs, the faithful dogs, who would still be alive when he was dead.

He thought with bitter regret of his mother. He barely remembered her; she had died four thousand years ago. She could have had a daughter, he told himself. She needn't have left me to finish it all alone!

Perhaps she had tried. He thought he remembered that she had, that there had been miscarriages. The human strain was grown thin and sickly with too much care. He himself might have been incapable of fathering a child, even in his years of strength: now it was too late to wonder.

Not like the dogs, he told himself somberly. Bred for use, not for their own pleasure. *I* never wanted a child when I was young. *They* think of nothing else.

He glanced again at Roland, and the dog's tail thumped against the paved floor.

A knot of pain gathered abruptly in the man's chest. He could well imagine the big-skulled whelps gathered around a fire in the evening, listening and looking while the older dogs told them of Man. He imagined their howls of dismay when they

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learned there were no more men in the world.

Century after century . . . perhaps in time they would forget there had ever been a race of masters. Perhaps their sorrow and their loss would turn to a vague sadness, a restless urge that would drive them as Man's restless seeking had driven him. In time they might be great.

And then all the works of Man would be forgotten, lost to eternity — merely the unimportant prelude to the reign of Dog.

The thought sharpened his pain intolerably. He picked up the cool tube of the tankard that lay on the table beside him and drew a long draft. The liquor lay heavily in him now. He was going to be sick soon.

He drank again and sucked air. He threw the tankard petulantly over the balustrade. "The tankard's empty," he said. "Fetch me another."

Roland was up instantly, wagging his foolish tail. "Yes, master," and he was away, the tankard clutched in his clumsy fingers.

ROLAND hurried, ignoring the tight band of pain at the base of his spine, the complaining twinges in his legs. However altered and bred, the canine body was not designed to walk erect. You took the gift and you gloried in it, but you paid for it. That was where old age first struck: very old dogs could not stand at all, but crept miserably on all fours, and the shame of it, Roland thought, shortened their lives.

The real agony came when duty pointed two ways at once; all else was of little account. For it was one thing to know what was best for the master — even to understand, in a dim corner of the mind, that the master was foolish, bitter, jealous, cruel. It was another thing to do what was best when the master ordered otherwise. To obey was joy and utter necessity; if the master commanded, "Kill me!"—though the heart burst with remorse, a dog would obey.

Thus it was joy to fill the tankard, to serve, and it was pain, for the liquor was a slow poison. And even this was nothing. There was the question of breeding, which must be settled soon now.

Roland was the last male of his line. He knew how the others had died, one for clumsiness, one for a tail too big, others for a habit of drooling or for the wrong pattern of spots, or simply because the master was in a rage.

But Roland was coming to the end of his potent term, and still the order to breed had not been given. The food machine was still dropping, into every morsel of

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food the dogs ate, the chemical agent that kept them sterile.

The youngest bitch now living could not survive more than another three hundred years. The master, if he were well served, could live another thousand.

As it had many times before, Roland's mind skirted around the unvoiced thought of the death that would be the master's — the lonely, miserable death of an outcast cur . . .

The dogs must breed. The master must give the order.

He filled the tankard and climbed the ramp, panting as the strain told on his tired legs. Near the doorway stood one of the females, waiting for him. She did not speak, but there was a question in her anxious eyes.

Roland shook his head sorrowfully and passed on.

He put the tankard on the little table, laid the drinking tube near the master's hand. The master did not appear to see him. Slumped among the cushions that filled the ebon and argent throne, he was gazing out into the sky. His bitter face was relaxed, almost peaceful.

PERHAPS he was thinking of the days of his youth, when he had roamed the whole world and made it his. Perhaps he was musing on the greatness his ancestors had known — the globe-girdling engines, the mighty cities, the depth and daring of intellect that had plumbed the last secrets of the universe.

It was a good time; Roland dared delay no longer. His heart was thudding painfully and his throat was dry as he said, "Master, may I speak?"

The man turned his head slowly and his red-rimmed eyes focused with surprise on Roland's face. "You back?" he asked heavily. "Where's the tankard?"

"Here, master," said Roland, moving it forward. He waited while the man picked up the tube and drank. Then he said again, "Master, may I speak?"

The man belched and wiped his crusted lips with his hand. "All right, what is it?"

The words tumbled out in confusion. "Master, I am the last male dog. I am near the end of my breeding time. If we do not breed, you will be left unattended when this generation is gone."

The man looked at him with open hostility in his narrow eyes. "Well, breed, then," he said. "Don't come to me for permission to play your dirty little games."

Roland's throat was hot with shame. "Master, to breed, I must stop the chemical in the food."

"Stop it."

They were playing a game, Roland knew. The master's memory was bad, but not this bad.

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His spirits lifted a little, even though he had little hope. If it was a game, then it gave the master pleasure. He said, "Master, that is done by an automatic machine. The control cylinder is under your seal."

The man stared at him silently for a moment, and scrubbed the bristles on his chin with one splotched and bony hand. "So that's it, is it?" he said. "You want me to unlock the cylinder so you can make another generation of whining, dirty pups."

"Yes, master."

"You want your whelps to outlive me."

"No, master!"

Volumes of unutterable things contended in Roland's mind. He felt shame, and horror, and a bottomless despair; and at the same time he knew that these were the things he was intended to feel, and he was glad. For a dog, however fine, is a dog; a man, however base, is a man.

The master said slowly, "What do you want then, Roland?"

"I want you to live," said the dog, and his voice broke. The slow, seldom tears of his race coursed down his cheeks.

The man was silent for a moment; then he turned away. "All right, bring it here to me," he said.

THE FEMALE was waiting halfway down the ramp; two more were behind her. They shrank timidly at his approach, but their eagerness held them. He had no heart to reprimand them as they deserved.

"Did he — ?"

"Yes!" said Roland. He hurried down the ramp, and the females followed him. More of them appeared at each stage of the descent, some racing ahead of him, some clustering behind. The corridor was filled with their involuntary yelps and whimpers of delight.

In the food room, a dozen of them were waiting for him, grouped around a cabinet against the far wall. They made a lane for him as he approached, and carefully, with ceremony, he unlocked the case and drew out the long cylinder, bound around with the wire and wax of the master's seal.

IN his throne of ebony and silver, the king of the world sat and stared at the blank, meaningless face of the sky. Behind him, down the ramp that always smelled of dog no matter how it was disinfected, he heard the faint far echo of canine glee.

Roland had told them all about it, he thought, and paused. He felt hurried, cheated of his chance of decision. It was necessary to give them renewed life,

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he knew; he would suffer, otherwise; he would die painfully and alone.

But he could not prolong his life without sparing them also; and that was bitter as gall. Better to end all at once, dog and man . . .

Roland came in, breathless, joy in his eyes, holding the cylinder

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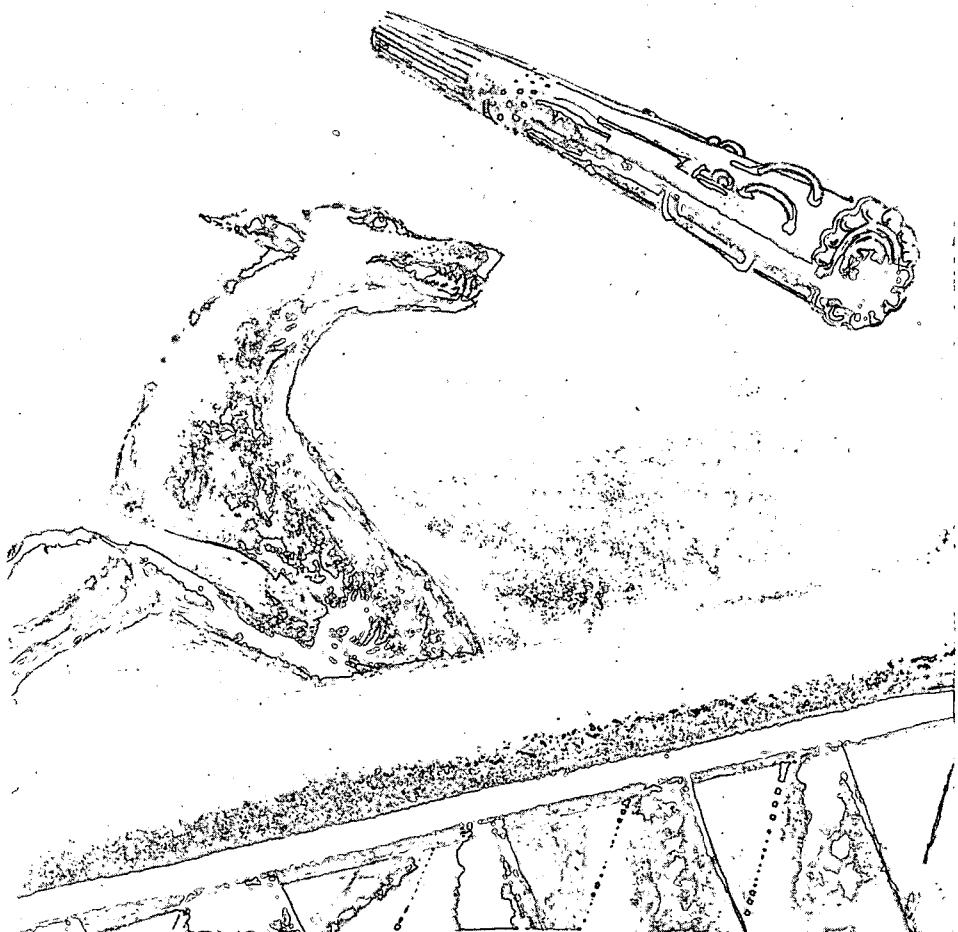
carefully in his hands. Wordless, he held it out.

The man took it — a slender tube of silvery metal, dotted with line-up slots and the sockets of other components, and laced about with wire and the red wax of his own seal.

How long ago had he done that? A hundred, two hundred



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years — he had known even then that this day must come.

He glanced at the waiting dog — and remembered to his astonishment that in the days of his youth, this dog's ancestor and image had been his dear friend. They had been closer than brothers. He had mourned for years after that dog's death.

How was it possible that things had so changed? He looked at Roland again, saw the broad, crinkled brow, the worshipful eyes. There had been no change here. It was incredible, to think how faithful that race had been. Millennium upon millennium, from the dawn of history until this day — all the thrown sticks retrieved, the households guarded, the blows accepted without anger. The weight of that loyalty seemed to him abruptly a crushing thing. What had his kind done to deserve it? And how could they ever repay?

The dogs were worthier . . .

And would survive.

In an instant that vision of the dog world that had forgotten Man came back to him, and his guilt receded, twisted upon itself, became a slow, bitter wrath.

He clutched the control cylinder in his hands, as if their feeble strength could break it.

"Master —" said Roland falteringly. "Is anything wrong?"

"Wrong?" he said. "Not for you. Your whelps will inherit the Earth. A bunch of dirty, flea-bitten, mangy *dogs*."

THE words were not enough; they came out in the quavering, impotent whine of an old man. He raised the cylinder, perhaps to strike; he did not know what he meant to do.

"Master? You will unseal the cylinder?"

Tears of rage leaked from the man's eye-corners. He said thickly, "Here's your damned cylinder. Catch it and you can have it!" And then the thing was done: he had flung out his arm with all its waning strength, and the cylinder was turning in the air, beyond the parapet.

Roland acted without thought. His hands and feet scrabbled on the flagstones, his muscles bunched in a pattern as old as the race; then he felt the smooth ivory of the balustrade for an instant under his feet.

He snapped once, vainly, at the cylinder as its arc passed him. Then there was nothing but the rushing wind around him.

The king of the world sat on his throne and listened to the bitches howl.

— DAMON KNIGHT

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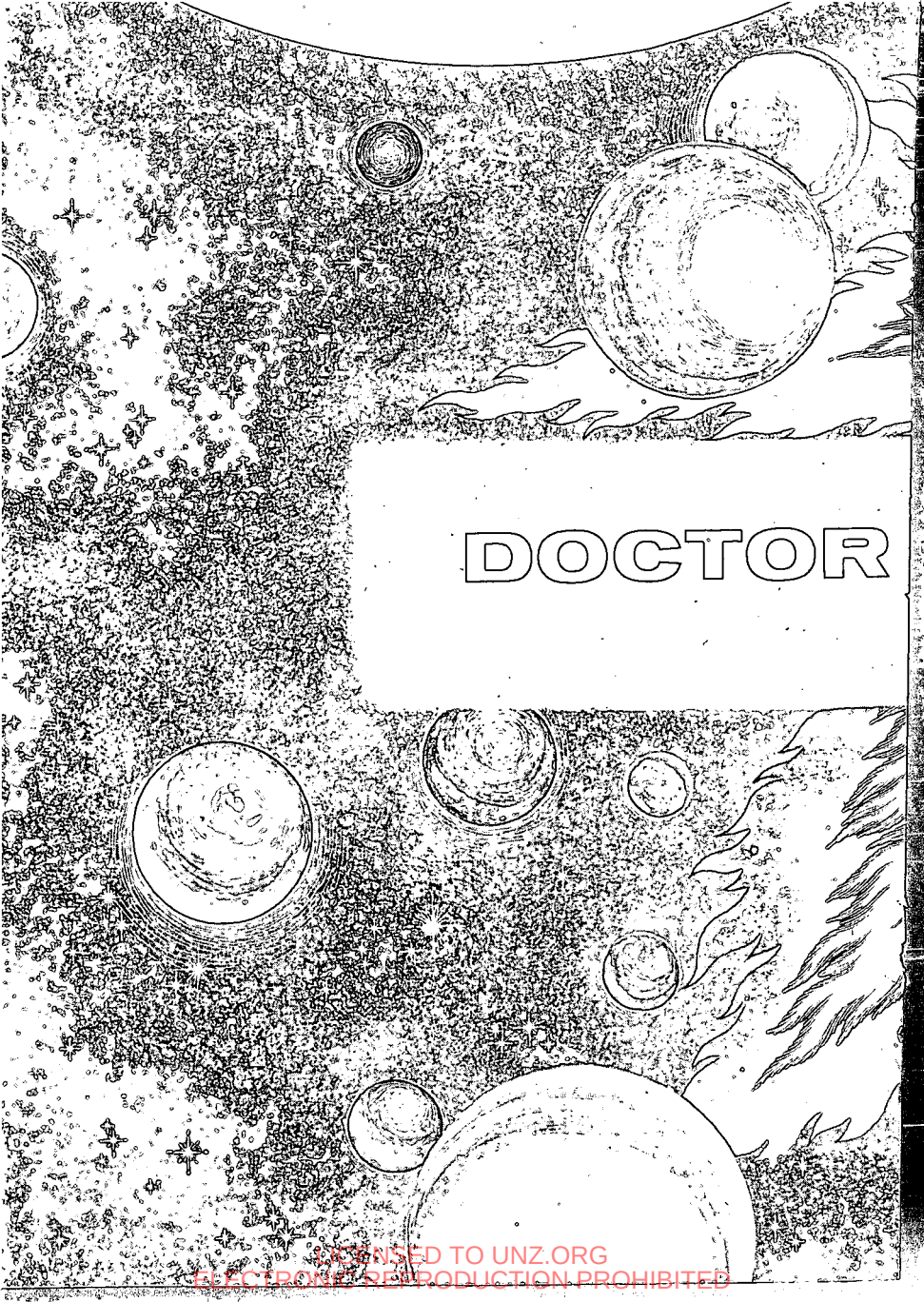

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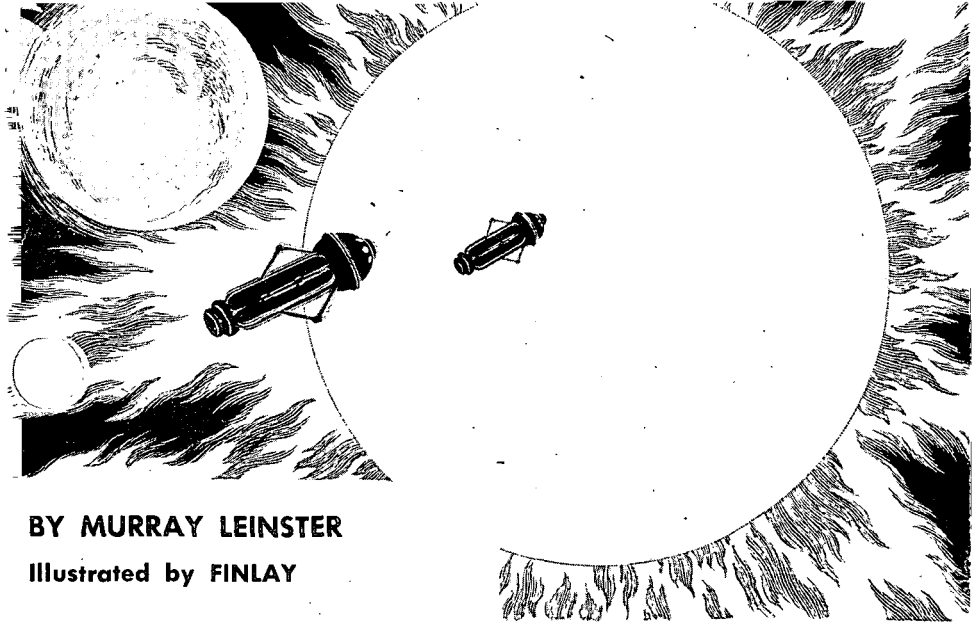

BY MURRAY LEINSTER

Illustrated by FINLAY

Suddenly the biggest thing in the universe was the very tiniest.

THERE were suns, which were nearby, and there were stars which were so far away that no way of telling their distance had any meaning. The suns had planets, most of which did not matter, but the ones that did count had seas and continents, and the continents had cities and highways and spaceports. And people.

The people paid no attention to their insignificance. They built ships which went through emptiness beyond imagining, and they landed upon planets and rebuilt them to their own liking. Suns flamed terribly, re-

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senting their impertinence, and storms swept across the planets they preëmpted, but the people built more strongly and were secure. Everything in the universe was bigger or stronger than the people, but they ignored the fact. They went about the businesses they had contrived for themselves.

They were not afraid of anything until somewhere on a certain small planet an infinitesimal single molecule changed itself.

It was one molecule among unthinkably many, upon one planet of one solar system among uncountable star clusters. It was not exactly alive, but it acted as if it were, in which it was like all the important matter of the cosmos. It was actually a combination of two complicated substances not too firmly joined together. When one of the parts changed, it became a new molecule. But, like the original one, it was still capable of a process called autocatalysis. It practiced that process and catalyzed other molecules into existence, which in each case were duplicates of itself. Then mankind had to take notice, though it ignored flaming suns and monstrous storms and emptiness past belief.

Men called the new molecule a virus and gave it a name. They called it "chlorophage." And chlorophage was, to people, the most terrifying thing in the universe.

IN A strictly temporary orbit around the planet Altaira, the *Star Queen* floated, while lift-ships brought passengers and cargo up to it. The ship was too large to be landed economically at an unimportant spaceport like Altaira. It was a very modern ship and it made the Regulus-to-Cassim run, which is five hundred light-years, in only fifty days of Earthtime.

Now the lift-ships were busy. There was an unusual number of passengers to board the *Star Queen* at Altaira and an unusual number of them were women and children. The children tended to pudginess and the women had the dieted look of the wives of well-to-do men. Most of them looked red-eyed, as if they had been crying.

One by one the lift-ships hooked onto the airlock of the *Star Queen* and delivered passengers and cargo to the ship. Presently the last of them was hooked on, and the last batch of passengers came through to the liner, and the ship's doctor watched them stream past him.

His air was negligent, but he was actually impatient. Like most doctors, Nordenfeld approved of clean children and wiry women.

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They had fewer things wrong with them and they responded better to treatment. Well, he was the doctor of the *Star Queen* and he had much authority. He'd exerted it back on Regulus to insist that a shipment of botanical specimens for Cassim travel in quarantine—to be exact, in the ship's practically unused hospital compartment—and he was prepared to exercise authority over the passengers.

He had a sheaf of health slips from the examiners on the ground below. There was one slip for each passenger. It certified that so-and-so had been examined and could safely be admitted to the *Star Queen's* air, her four restaurants, her two swimming pools, her recreation areas and the six levels of passenger cabins the ship contained.

He impatiently watched the people go by. Health slips or no health slips, he looked them over. A characteristic gait or a typical complexion tint, or even a certain lack of hair luster, could tell him things that ground physicians might miss. In such a case the passenger would go back down again. It was not desirable to have deaths on a liner in space. Of course nobody was ever refused passage because of chlorophage. If it were ever discovered, the discovery would already be too late. But the health regulations for space travel were very, very strict.

He looked twice at a young woman as she passed. Despite applied complexion, there was a trace of waxiness in her skin. Nordenfeld had never actually seen a case of chlorophage. No doctor alive ever had. The best authorities were those who'd been in Patrol ships during the quarantine of Kamerun when chlorophage was loose on that planet. They'd seen beamed-up pictures of patients, but not patients themselves. The Patrol ships stayed in orbit while the planet died. Most doctors, and Nordenfeld was among them, had only seen pictures of the screens which showed the patients.

HE looked sharply at the young woman. Then he glanced at her hands. They were normal. The young woman went on, unaware that for the fraction of an instant there had been the possibility of the landing of the *Star Queen* on Altaira, and the destruction of her space drive, and the establishment of a quarantine which, if justified, would mean that nobody could ever leave Altaira again, but must wait there to die. Which would not be a long wait.

A fat man puffed past. The gravity on Altaira was some five

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per cent under ship-normal and he felt the difference at once. But the veins at his temples were ungorged. Nordenfeld let him go by.

There appeared a white-haired, space-tanned man with a briefcase under his arm. He saw Nordenfeld and lifted a hand in greeting. The doctor knew him. He stepped aside from the passengers and stood there. His name was Jensen, and he represented a fund which invested the surplus money of insurance companies. He traveled a great deal to check on the business interests of that organization.

The doctor grunted, "What're you doing here? I thought you'd be on the far side of the cluster."

"Oh, I get about," said Jensen. His manner was not quite normal. He was tense. "I got here two weeks ago on a Q-and-C tramp from Regulus. We were a ship load of salt meat. There's romance for you! Salt meat by the spaceship load!"

The doctor grunted again. All sorts of things moved through space, naturally. The *Star Queen* carried a botanical collection for a museum and pig-beryllium and furs and enzymes and a list of items no man could remember. He watched the passengers go by, automatically counting them against the number of health slips in his hand.

"Lots of passengers this trip," said Jensen.

"Yes," said the doctor, watching a man with a limp. "Why?"

Jensen shrugged and did not answer. He was uneasy, the doctor noted. He and Jensen were as much unlike as two men could very well be, but Jensen was good company. A ship's doctor does not have much congenial society.

The file of passengers ended abruptly. There was no one in the *Star Queen's* airlock, but the "Connected" lights still burned and the doctor could look through into the small lift-ship from the planet down below. He frowned. He fingered the sheaf of papers.

"Unless I missed count," he said annoyedly, "there's supposed to be one more passenger. I don't see — "

A door opened far back in the lift-ship. A small figure appeared. It was a little girl perhaps ten years old. She was very neatly dressed, though not quite the way a mother would have done it. She wore the carefully composed expression of a child with no adult in charge of her. She walked precisely from the lift-ship into the *Star Queen's* lock. The opening closed briskly behind her. There was the rumbling of seals making themselves tight. The lights flickered for

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"Disconnect" and then "All Clear." They went out, and the lift-ship had pulled away from the *Star Queen.*

"There's my missing passenger," said the doctor.

THE child looked soberly about. She saw him. "Excuse me," she said very politely. "Is this the way I'm supposed to go?"

"Through that door," said the doctor gruffly.

"Thank you," said the little girl. She followed his direction. She vanished through the door. It closed.

There came a deep, droning sound, which was the interplanetary drive of the *Star Queen,* building up that directional stress in space which had seemed such a triumph when it was first contrived. The ship swung gently. It would be turning out from orbit around Altaira. It swung again. The doctor knew that its astrogators were feeling for the incredibly exact pointing of its nose toward the next port which modern commercial ship operation required. An error of fractional seconds of arc would mean valuable time lost in making port some ten light-years of distance away. The drive droned and droned, building up velocity while the ship's aiming was refined and re-refined.

The drive cut off abruptly. Jensen turned white.

The doctor said impatiently, "There's nothing wrong. Probably a message or a report should have been beamed down to the planet and somebody forgot. We'll go on in a minute."

But Jensen stood frozen. He was very pale. The interplanetary drive stayed off. Thirty seconds. A minute. Jensen swallowed audibly. Two minutes. Three.

The steady, monotonous drone began again. It continued interminably, as if while it was off the ship's head had swung wide of its destination and the whole business of lining up for a jump in overdrive had to be done all over again.

Then there came that "Ping-g-g-g!" and the sensation of spiral fall which meant overdrive. The droning ceased.

Jensen breathed again. The ship's doctor looked at him sharply. Jensen had been taut. Now the tensions had left his body, but he looked as if he were going to shiver. Instead, he mopped a suddenly streaming forehead.

"I think," said Jensen in a strange voice, "that I'll have a drink. Or several. Will you join me?"

Nordenfeld searched his face.

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A ship's doctor has many duties in space. Passengers can have many things wrong with them, and in the absolute isolation of overdrive they can be remarkably affected by each other.

"I'll be at the fourth-level bar in twenty minutes," said Nordenfeld. "Can you wait that long?"

"I probably won't wait to have a drink," said Jensen. "But I'll be there."

The doctor nodded curtly. He went away. He made no guesses, though he'd just observed the new passengers carefully and was fully aware of the strict health regulations that affect space travel. As a physician he knew that the most deadly thing in the universe was chlorophage and that the planet Kamerun was only one solar system away. It had been a stop for the *Star Queen* until four years ago. He puzzled over Jensen's tenseness and the relief he'd displayed when the overdrive field came on. But he didn't guess. Chlorophage didn't enter his mind.

Not until later.

HE SAW the little girl who'd come out of the airlock last of all the passengers. She sat on a sofa as if someone had told her to wait there until something or other was arranged. Doctor Nordenfeld barely glanced at her. He'd known Jensen for a considerable time. Jensen had been a passenger on the *Star Queen* half a dozen times, and he shouldn't have been upset by the temporary stoppage of an interplanetary drive. Nordenfeld divided people into two classes, those who were not and those who were worth talking to. There weren't many of the latter. Jensen was.

He filed away the health slips. Then, thinking of Jensen's pallor, he asked what had happened to make the *Star Queen* interrupt her slow-speed drive away from orbit around Altaira.

The purser told him. But the purser was fussily concerned because there were so many extra passengers from Altaira. He might not be able to take on the expected number of passengers at the next stop-over point. It would be bad business to have to refuse passengers! It would give the space line a bad name.

Then the air officer stopped Nordenfeld as he was about to join Jensen in the fourth-level bar. It was time for a medical inspection of the quarter-acre of Banthyan jungle which purified and renewed the air of the ship. Nordenfeld was expected to check the complex ecological system of the air room. Specifically, he was expected to look for and identify any patches of

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colorlessness appearing on the foliage of the jungle plants the *Star Queen* carried through space.

The air officer was discreet and Nordenfeld was silent about the ultimate reason for the inspection. Nobody liked to think about it. But if a particular kind of bleaching appeared, as if the chlorophyll of the leaves were being devoured by something too small to be seen by an optical microscope — why, that would be chlorophage. It would also be a death sentence for the *Star Queen* and everybody in her.

But the jungle passed medical inspection. The plants grew lushly in soil which periodically was flushed with hydroponic solution and then drained away again. The UV lamps were properly distributed and the different quarters of the air room were alternately lighted and darkened. And there were no colorless patches. A steady wind blew through the air room and had its excess moisture and unpleasing smells wrung out before it recirculated through the ship. Doctor Nordenfeld authorized the trimming of some liana-like growths which were developing woody tissue at the expense of leaves.

The air officer also told him about the reason for the turning off of the interplanetary drive. He considered it a very curious happening.

The doctor left the air room and passed the place where the little girl — the last passenger to board the *Star Queen* — waited patiently for somebody to arrange something. Doctor Nordenfeld took a lift to the fourth level and went into the bar where Jensen should be waiting.

He was. He had an empty glass before him. Nordenfeld sat down and dialed for a drink. He had an indefinite feeling that something was wrong, but he couldn't put his finger on it. There are always things going wrong for a ship's doctor, though. There are so many demands on his patience that he is usually short of it.

Jensen watched him sip at his drink.

"A bad day?" he asked. He'd gotten over his own tension.

NORDENFELD shrugged, but his scowl deepened. "There are a lot of new passengers." He realized that he was trying to explain his feelings to himself. "They'll come to me feeling miserable. I have to tell each one that if they feel heavy and depressed, it may be the gravity-constant of the ship, which is greater than their home planet. If they feel light-headed and giddy, it may be because the

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gravity-constant of the ship is less than they're used to. But it doesn't make them feel better, so they come back for a second assurance. I'll be overwhelmed with such complaints within two hours."

Jensen waited. Then he said casually — too casually, "Does anybody ever suspect chlorophage?"

"No," said Nordenfeld shortly.

Jensen fidgeted. He sipped. Then he said, "What's the news from Kamerun, anyhow?"

"There isn't any," said Nordenfeld. "Naturally! Why ask?"

"I just wondered," said Jensen. After a moment: "What was the last news?"

"There hasn't been a message from Kamerun in two years," said Nordenfeld curtly. "There's no sign of anything green anywhere on the planet. It's considered to be — uninhabited."

Jensen licked his lips. "That's what I understood. Yes."

Nordenfeld drank half his drink and said unpleasantly, "There were thirty million people on Kamerun when the chlorophage appeared. At first it was apparently a virus which fed on the chlorophyll of plants. They died. Then it was discovered that it could also feed on hemoglobin, which is chemically close to chlorophyll. Hemoglobin is the red coloring matter of the blood. When the virus consumed it, people began to die. Kamerun doctors found that the chlorophage virus was transmitted by contact, by inhalation, by ingestion. It traveled as dust particles and on the feet of insects, and it was in drinking water and the air one breathed. The doctors on Kamerun warned spaceships off and the Patrol put a quarantine fleet in orbit around it to keep anybody from leaving. And nobody left. And everybody died. *And* so did every living thing that had chlorophyll in its leaves or hemoglobin in its blood, or that needed plant or animal tissues to feed on. There's not a person left alive on Kamerun, nor an animal or bird or insect, nor a fish nor a tree, or plant or weed or blade of grass. There's no longer a quarantine fleet there. Nobody'll go there and there's nobody left to leave. But there are beacon satellites to record any calls and to warn any fool against landing. If the chlorophage got loose and was carried about by spaceships, it could kill the other forty billion humans in the galaxy, together with every green plant or animal with hemoglobin in its blood."

"That," said Jensen, and tried to smile, "sounds final."

"It isn't," Nordenfeld told him. "If there's something in the universe which can kill every

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living thing except its maker, that something should be killed. There should be research going on about the chlorophage. It would be deadly dangerous work, but it should be done. A quarantine won't stop contagion. It can only hinder it. That's useful, but not enough."

Jensen moistened his lips.

Nordenfeld said abruptly, "I've answered your questions. Now what's on your mind and what has it to do with chlorophage?"

Jensen started. He went very pale.

"It's too late to do anything about it," said Nordenfeld. "It's probably nonsense anyhow. But what is it?"

Jensen stammered out his story. It explained why there were so many passengers for the *Star Queen.* It even explained his departure from Altaira. But it was only a rumor — the kind of rumor that starts up untraceably and can never be verified. This one was officially denied by the Altairan planetary government. But it was widely believed by the sort of people who usually were well-informed. Those who could sent their families up to the *Star Queen.* And that was why Jensen had been tense and worried until the liner had actually left Altaira behind. Then he felt safe.

Nordenfeld's jaw set as Jensen told his tale. He made no comment, but when Jensen was through he nodded and went away, leaving his drink unfinished. Jensen couldn't see his face; it was hard as granite.

And Nordenfeld, the ship's doctor of the *Star Queen,* went into the nearest bathroom and was violently sick. It was a reaction to what he'd just learned.

THERE WERE stars which were so far away that their distance didn't mean anything. There were planets beyond counting in a single star cluster, let alone the galaxy. There were comets and gas clouds in space, and worlds where there was life, and other worlds where life was impossible. The quantity of matter which was associated with life was infinitesimal, and the quantity associated with consciousness — animal life — was so much less that the difference couldn't be expressed. But the amount of animal life which could reason was so minute by comparison that the nearest ratio would be that of a single atom to a sun. Mankind, in fact, was the least impressive fraction of the smallest category of substance in the galaxy.

But men did curious things.

There was the cutting off of the *Star Queen's* short-distance

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drive before she'd gotten well away from Altaira. There had been a lift-ship locked to the liner's passenger airlock. When the last passenger entered the big ship — a little girl — the airlocks disconnected and the lift-ship pulled swiftly away.

It was not quite two miles from the *Star Queen* when its emergency airlocks opened and spacesuited figures plunged out of it to emptiness. Simultaneously, the ports of the lift-ship glowed and almost immediately the whole plating turned cherry-red, crimson, and then orange, from unlimited heat developed within it.

The lift-ship went incandescent and ruptured and there was a spout of white-hot air, and then it turned blue-white and puffed itself to nothing in metallic steam. Where it had been there was only shining gas, which cooled. Beyond it there were figures in spacesuits which tried to swim away from it.

The *Star Queen's* control room, obviously, saw the happening. The lift-ship's atomic pile had flared out of control and melted down the ship. It had developed something like sixty thousand degrees Fahrenheit when it ceased to flare. It did not blow up; it only vaporized. But the process must have begun within seconds after the lift-ship broke contact with the *Star Queen.*

In automatic reaction, the man in control of the liner cut her drive and offered to turn back and pick up the spacesuited figures in emptiness. The offer was declined with almost hysterical haste. In fact, it was barely made before the other lift-ships moved in on rescue missions. They had waited. And they were picking up castaways before the *Star Queen* resumed its merely interplanetary drive and the process of aiming for a solar system some thirty light-years away.

When the liner flicked into overdrive, more than half the floating figures had been recovered, which was remarkable. It was almost as remarkable as the flare-up of the lift-ship's atomic pile. One has to know exactly what to do to make a properly designed atomic pile vaporize metal. Somebody had known. Somebody had done it. And the other lift-ships were waiting to pick up the destroyed lift-ship's crew when it happened.

The matter of the lift-ship's destruction was fresh in Nordenfeld's mind when Jensen had told his story. The two items fitted together with an appalling completeness. They left little doubt or hope.

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NORDENFELD consulted the passenger records and presently was engaged in conversation with the sober-faced, composed little girl on a sofa in one of the cabin levels of the *Star Queen.*

"You're Kathy Brand, I believe," he said matter-of-factly. "I understand you've been having a rather bad time of it."

She seemed to consider.

"It hasn't been too bad," she assured him. "At least I've been seeing new things. I got dreadfully tired of seeing the same things all the time."

"What things?" asked Nordenfeld. His expression was not stern now, though his inner sensations were not pleasant. He needed to talk to this child, and he had learned how to talk to children. The secret is to talk exactly as to an adult, with respect and interest.

"There weren't any windows," she explained, "and my father couldn't play with me, and all the toys and books were ruined by the water. It was dreadfully tedious. There weren't any other children, you see. And presently there weren't any grownups but my father."

Nordenfeld only looked more interested. He'd been almost sure ever since knowing of the lift-ship's destruction and listening to Jensen's account of the rumor the government of Altaira denied. He was horribly sure now.

"How long were you in the place that hadn't any windows?"

"Oh, dreadfully long!" she said. "Since I was only six years old! Almost half my life!" She smiled brightly at him. "I remember looking out of windows and even playing out-of-doors, but my father and mother said I had to live in this place. My father talked to me often and often. He was very nice. But he had to wear that funny suit and keep the glass over his face because he didn't live in the room. The glass was because he went under the water, you know."

Nordenfeld asked carefully conversational-sounding questions. Kathy Brand, now aged ten, had been taken by her father to live in a big room without any windows. It hadn't any doors, either. There were plants in it, and there were bluish lights to shine on the plants, and there was a place in one corner where there was water. When her father came in to talk to her, he came up out of the water wearing the funny suit with glass over his face. He went out the same way. There was a place in the wall where she could look out into another room, and at first her mother used to come and smile at her through the

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glass, and she talked into something she held in her hand, and her voice came inside. But later she stopped coming.

THERE was only one possible kind of place which would answer Kathy's description. When she was six years old she had been put into some university's aseptic-environment room. And she had stayed there. Such rooms were designed for biological research. They were built and then made sterile of all bacterial life and afterward entered through a tank of antiseptic. Anyone who entered wore a suit which was made germ-free by its passage through the antiseptic, and he did not breathe the air of the aseptic room, but air which was supplied him through a hose, the exhaled-air hose also passing under the antiseptic outside. No germ or microbe or virus could possibly get into such a room without being bathed in corrosive fluid which would kill it. So long as there was someone alive outside to take care of her, a little girl could live there and defy even chlorophage.

And Kathy Brand had done it. But, on the other hand, Kamerun was the only planet where it would be necessary, and it was the only world from which a father would land his small daughter on another planet's spaceport. There was no doubt. Nordenfeld grimly imagined someone — he would have had to be a microbiologist even to attempt it — fighting to survive and defeat the chlorophage while he kept his little girl in an aseptic-environment room.

She explained quite pleasantly as Nordenfeld asked more questions. There had been other people besides her father, but for a long time there had been only him. And Nordenfeld computed that somehow she'd been kept alive on the dead planet Kamerun for four long years.

Recently, though — very recently — her father told her that they were leaving. Wearing his funny, antiseptic-wetted suit, he'd enclosed her in a plastic bag with a tank attached to it. Air flowed from the tank into the bag and out through a hose that was all wetted inside. She breathed quite comfortably.

It made sense. An air tank could be heated and its contents sterilized to supply germ-free — or virus-free — air. And Kathy's father took an axe and chopped away a wall of the room. He picked her up, still inside the plastic bag, and carried her out. There was nobody about. There was no grass. There were no trees. Nothing moved.

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Here Kathy's account was vague, but Nordenfeld could guess at the strangeness of a dead planet, to the child who barely remembered anything but the walls of an aseptic-environment room.

Her father carried her to a little ship, said Kathy, and they talked a lot after the ship took off. He told her that he was taking her to a place where she could run about outdoors and play, but he had to go somewhere else. He did mysterious things which to Nordenfeld meant a most scrupulous decontamination of a small spaceship's interior and its airlock. Its outer surface would reach a temperature at which no organic material could remain uncooked.

And finally, said Kathy, her father had opened a door and told her to step out and good-by, and she did, and the ship went away — her father still wearing his funny suit — and people came and asked her questions she did not understand.

KATHY'S narrative fitted perfectly into the rumor Jensen said circulated among usually well-informed people on Altaira. They believed, said Jensen, that a small spaceship had appeared in the sky above Altaira's spaceport. It ignored all calls, landed swiftly, opened an airlock and let someone out, and plunged for the sky again. And the story said that radar telescopes immediately searched for and found the ship in space. They trailed it, calling vainly for it to identify itself, while it drove at top speed for Altaira's sun.

It reached the sun and dived in.

Nordenfeld reached the skipper on intercom vision-phone. Jensen had been called there to repeat his tale to the skipper.

"I've talked to the child," said Nordenfeld grimly, "and I'm putting her into isolation quarters in the hospital compartment. She's from Kamerun. She was kept in an aseptic-environment room at some university or other. She says her father looked after her. I get an impression of a last-ditch fight by microbiologists against the chlorophage. They lost it. Apparently her father landed her on Altaira and dived into the sun. From her story, he took every possible precaution to keep her from contagion or carrying contagion with her to Altaira. Maybe he succeeded. There's no way to tell — yet."

The skipper listened in silence.

Jensen said thinly, "Then the story about the landing was true."

"Yes. The authorities isolated her, and then shipped her off on the *Star Queen*. Your well-in-

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formed friends, Jensen, didn't know what their government was going to do!" Nordenfeld paused, and said more coldly still, "They didn't handle it right. They should have killed her, painlessly but at once. Her body should have been immersed, with everything that had touched it, in full-strength nitric acid. The same acid should have saturated the place where the ship landed and every place she walked. Every room she entered, and every hall she passed through, should have been doused with nitric and then burned. It would still not have been all one could wish. The air she breathed couldn't be recaptured and heated white-hot. But the chances for Altaira's population to go on living would be improved. Instead, they isolated her and they shipped her off with us — and thought they were accomplishing something by destroying the lift-ship that had her in an airtight compartment until she walked into the *Star Queen's* lock!"

The skipper said heavily, "Do you think she's brought chlorophage on board?"

"I've no idea," said Nordenfeld. "If she did, it's too late to do anything but drive the *Star Queen* into the nearest sun . . . No. Before that, one should give warning that she was aground on Altaira. No ship should land there. No ship should take off. Altaira should be blocked off from the rest of the galaxy like Kamerun was. And to the same end result."

Jensen said unsteadily; "There'll be trouble if this is known on the ship. There'll be some unwilling to sacrifice themselves."

"Sacrifice?" said Nordenfeld. "They're dead! But before they lie down, they can keep everybody they care about from dying too! Would you want to land and have your wife and family die of it?"

The skipper said in the same heavy voice, "What are the probabilities? You say there was an effort to keep her from contagion. What are the odds?"

"Bad," said Nordenfeld. "The man tried, for the child's sake. But I doubt he managed to make a completely aseptic transfer from the room she lived in to the spaceport on Altaira. The authorities on Altaira should have known it. They should have killed her and destroyed everything she'd touched. And *still* the odds would have been bad!"

Jensen said, "But you can't do that, Nordenfeld! Not now!"

"I shall take every measure that seems likely to be useful." Then Nordenfeld snapped, "Dam-

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nation, man! Do you realize that this chlorophage can wipe out the human race if it really gets loose? Do you think I'll let sentiment keep me from doing what has to be done?"

He flicked off the visionphone.

THE *Star Queen* came out of overdrive. Her skipper arranged it to be done at the time when the largest possible number of her passengers and crew would be asleep. Those who were awake, of course, felt the peculiar inaudible sensation which one subjectively translated into sound. They felt the momentary giddiness which — having no natural parallel — feels like the sensation of treading on a stair-step that isn't there, combined with a twisting sensation so it is like a spiral fall. The passengers who were awake were mostly in the bars, and the bartenders explained that the ship had shifted overdrive generators and there was nothing to it.

Those who were asleep started awake, but there was nothing in their surroundings to cause alarm. Some blinked in the darkness of their cabins and perhaps turned on the cabin lights, but everything seemed normal. They turned off the lights again. Some babies cried and had to be soothed. But there was nothing except wakening to alarm anybody. Babies went back to sleep and mothers returned to their beds and — such awakenings being customary — went back to sleep also.

It was natural enough. There were vague and commonplace noises, together making an indefinite hum. Fans circulated the ship's purified and reinvigorated air. Service motors turned in remote parts of the hull. Cooks and bakers moved about in the kitchens. Nobody could tell by any physical sensation that the *Star Queen* was not in overdrive, except in the control room.

There the stars could be seen. They were unthinkably remote. The ship was light-years from any place where humans lived. She did not drive. Her skipper had a family on Cassim. He would not land a plague ship which might destroy them. The executive officer had a small son. If his return meant that small son's death as well as his own, he would not return. All through the ship, the officers who had to know the situation recognized that if chlorophage had gotten into the *Star Queen*, the ship must not land anywhere. Nobody could survive. Nobody must attempt it.

So the huge liner hung in the emptiness between the stars,

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waiting until it could be known definitely that chlorophage was aboard or that with absolute certainty it was absent. The question was up to Doctor Nordenfeld.

He had isolated himself with Kathy in the ship's hospital compartment. Since the ship was built it had been used once by a grown man who developed mumps, and once by an adolescent boy who developed a raging fever which antibiotics stopped. Health measures for space travel were strict. The hospital compartment had only been used those two times.

ON THIS voyage it had been used to contain an assortment of botanical specimens from a planet seventy light-years beyond Regulus. They were on their way to the botanical research laboratory on Cassim. As a routine precaution they'd been placed in the hospital, which could be fumigated when they were taken out. Now the doctor had piled them in one side of the compartment, which he had divided in half with a transparent plastic sheet. He stayed in that side. Kathy occupied the other.

She had some flowering plants to look at and admire. They'd come from the air room and she was delighted with their coloring

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and beauty. But Doctor Nordenfeld had put them there as a continuing test for chlorophage. If Kathy carried that murderous virus on her person, the flowering plants would die of it — probably even before she did.

It was a scrupulously scientific test for the deadly stuff. Completely sealed off except for a circulator to freshen the air she breathed, Kathy was settled with toys and picture books. It was an improvised but well-designed germproof room. The air for Kathy to breathe was sterilized before it reached her. The air she had breathed was sterilized as it left her plastic-sided residence. It should be the perfection of protection for the ship — if it was not already too late.

The vision-phone buzzed. Doctor Nordenfeld stirred in his chair and flipped the switch. The *Star Queen's* skipper looked at him out of the screen.

"I've cut the overdrive," said the skipper. "The passengers haven't been told."

"Very sensible," said the doctor.

"When will we know?"

"That we can go on living? When the other possibility is exhausted."

"Then, how will we know?" asked skipper stonily.

Doctor Nordenfeld ticked off the possibilities. He bent down a finger. "One, her father took great pains. Maybe he did manage an aseptic transfer from a germ-free room to Altaira. Kathy may not have been exposed to the chlorophage. If she hasn't, no bleached spots will show up on the air-room foliage or among the flowering plants in the room with her. Nobody in the crew or among the passengers will die."

He bent down a second finger. "It is probably more likely that white spots will appear on the plants in the air room *and* here, and people will start to die. That will mean Kathy brought contagion here the instant she arrived, and almost certainly that Altaira will become like Kamerun — uninhabited. In such a case we are finished."

HE BENT down a third finger. "Not so likely, but preferable, white spots may appear on the foliage inside the plastic with Kathy, but not in the ship's air room. In that case she was exposed, but the virus was incubating when she came on board, and only developed and spread after she was isolated. Possibly, in such a case, we can save the passengers and crew, but the ship will probably have to be melted down in space. It would be tricky, but it might be done."

The skipper hesitated. "If that last happened, she — "

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"I will take whatever measures are necessary," said Doctor Nordenfeld. "To save your conscience, we won't discuss them. They should have been taken on Altaira."

He reached over and flipped off the phone. Then he looked up and into the other part of the ship's hospital space. Kathy came out from behind a screen, where she'd made ready for bed. She was beaming. She had a large picture book under one arm and a doll under the other.

"It's all right for me to have these with me, isn't it, Doctor Nordenfeld?" she asked hopefully. "I didn't have any picture books but one, and it got worn out. And my doll — it was dreadful how shabby she was!"

The doctor frowned. She smiled at him. He said, "After all, picture books are made to be looked at and dolls to be played with."

She skipped to the tiny hospital bed on the far side of the presumably virusproof partition. She climbed into it and zestfully arranged the doll to share it. She placed the book within easy reach.

She said, "I think my father would say you were very nice, Doctor Nordenfeld, to look after me so well."

"No-o-o-o," said the doctor in a detached voice. "I'm just doing what anybody ought to do."

She snuggled down under the covers. He looked at his watch and shrugged. It was very easy to confuse official night with official day, in space. Everybody else was asleep. He'd been putting Kathy through tests which began with measurements of pulse and respiration and temperature and went on from there. Kathy managed them herself, under his direction.

He settled down with one of the medical books he'd brought into the isolation section with him. Its title was *Decontamination of Infectious Material from Different Planets*. He read it grimly.

THE TIME came when the *Star Queen* should have come out of overdrive with the sun Circe blazing fiercely nearby, and a green planet with ice caps to be approached on interplanetary drive. There should have been droning, comforting drive noises to assure the passengers — who naturally could not see beyond the ship's steel walls — that they were within a mere few million miles of a world where sunshine was normal, and skies were higher than ship's ceilings, and there were fascinating things to see and do.

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Some of the passengers packed their luggage and put it outside their cabins to be picked up for landing. But no stewards came for it. Presently there was an explanation. The ship had run under maximum speed and the planetfall would be delayed.

The passengers were disappointed but not concerned. The luggage vanished into cabins again.

The *Star Queen* floated in space among a thousand thousand million stars. Her astrogators had computed a course to the nearest star into which to drive the *Star Queen,* but it would not be used unless there was mutiny among the crew. It would be better to go in remote orbit around Circe III and give the news of chlorophage on Altaira, if Doctor Nordenfeld reported it on the ship.

Time passed. One day. Two. Three. Then Jensen called the hospital compartment on visionphone. His expression was dazed. Nordenfeld saw the interior of the control room behind Jensen. He said, "You're a passenger, Jensen. How is it you're in the control room?"

Jensen moistened his lips. "The skipper thought I'd better not associate with the other passengers. I've stayed with the officers the past few days. We— the ones who know what's in prospect — we're keeping separate from the others so — nobody will let anything out by accident."

"Very wise. When the skipper comes back on duty, ask him to call me. I've something interesting to tell him."

"He's — checking something now," said Jensen. His voice was thin and reedy. "The — air officer reports there are white patches on the plants in the air room. They're growing. Fast. He told me to tell you. He's — gone to make sure."

"No need," said Nordenfeld bitterly.

He swung the vision-screen. It faced that part of the hospital space beyond the plastic sheeting. There were potted flowering plants there. They had pleased Kathy. They shared her air. And there were white patches on their leaves.

"I thought," said Nordenfeld with an odd mirthless levity, "that the skipper'd be interested. It is of no importance whatever now, but I accomplished something remarkable. Kathy's father didn't manage an aseptic transfer. She brought the chlorophage with her. But I confined it. The plants on the far side of that plastic sheet show the chlorophage patches plainly. I expect Kathy to show signs of anemia shortly. I'd decided that drastic

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measures would have to be taken, and it looked like they might work, because I've confined the virus. It's there where Kathy is, but it isn't where I am. All the botanical specimens on my side of the sheet are untouched. The phage hasn't hit them. It is remarkable. But it doesn't matter a damn if the air room's infected. And I was so proud!"

Jensen did not respond.

NORDENFELD said ironically, "Look what I accomplished! I protected the air plants on my side See? They're beautifully green! No sign of infection! It means that a man can work with chlorophage! A laboratory ship could land on Kamerun and keep itself the equivalent of an aseptic-environment room while the damned chlorophage was investigated and ultimately whipped! And it doesn't matter!"

Jensen said numbly, "We can't ever make port. We ought — we ought to — "

"We'll take the necessary measures," Nordenfeld told him. "Very quietly and very efficiently, with neither the crew nor the passengers knowing that Altaira sent the chlorophage on board the *Star Queen* in the hope of banishing it from there. The passengers won't know that their own officials shipped it off with them as they tried to run away . . . And I was so proud that I'd improvised an aseptic room to keep Kathy in! I sterilized the air that went in to her, and I sterilized — "

Then he stopped. He stopped quite short. He stared at the air unit, set up and with two pipes passing through the plastic partition which cut the hospital space in two. He turned utterly white. He went roughly to the air machine. He jerked back its cover. He put his hand inside.

Minutes later he faced back to the vision-screen from which Jensen looked apathetically at him.

"Tell the skipper to call me," he said in a savage tone. "Tell him to call me instantly he comes back! Before he issues any orders at all!"

He bent over the sterilizing equipment and very carefully began to disassemble it. He had it completely apart when Kathy waked. She peered at him through the plastic separation sheet.

"Good morning, Doctor Nordenfeld," she said cheerfully.

The doctor grunted. Kathy smiled at him. She had gotten on very good terms with the doctor, since she'd been kept in the ship's hospital. She did not feel that she was isolated. In having the doctor where she

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could talk to him at any time, she had much more company than ever before. She had read her entire picture book to him and discussed her doll at length. She took it for granted that when he did not answer or frowned that he was simply busy. But he was company because she could see him.

Doctor Nordenfeld put the air apparatus together with an extremely peculiar expression on his face. It had been built for Kathy's special isolation by a ship's mechanic. It should sterilize the used air going into Kathy's part of the compartment, and it should sterilize the used air pushed out by the supplied fresh air. The hospital itself was an independent sealed unit, with its own chemical air freshener, and it had been divided into two. The air freshener was where Doctor Nordenfeld could attend to it, and the sterilizer pump simply shared the freshening with Kathy. But —

But the pipe that pumped air to Kathy was brown and discolored from having been used for sterilizing, and the pipe that brought air back was not. It was cold. It had never been heated.

So Doctor Nordenfeld had been exposed to any contagion Kathy could spread. He hadn't been protected at all. Yet the potted plants on Kathy's side of the barrier were marked with great white splotches which grew almost as one looked, while the botanical specimens in the doctor's part of the hospital — as much infected as Kathy's could have been, by failure of the ship's mechanic to build the sterilizer to work two ways: the stacked plants, the alien plants, the strange plants from seventy light-years beyond Regulus — they were vividly green. There was no trace of chlorophage on them. Yet they had been as thoroughly exposed as Doctor Nordenfeld himself!

The doctor's hands shook. His eyes burned. He took out a surgeon's scalpel and ripped the plastic partition from floor to ceiling. Kathy watched interestedly.

"Why did you do that, Doctor Nordenfeld?" she asked.

He said in an emotionless, unnatural voice, "I'm going to do something that it was very stupid of me not to do before. It should have been done when you were six years old, Kathy. It should have been done on Kamerun, and after that on Altaira. Now we're going to do it here. You can help me."

THE *Star Queen* had floated out of overdrive long enough to throw all distance computations off. But she swung about,

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and swam back, and presently she was not too far from the world where she was now many days overdue. Lift-ships started up from the planet's surface. But the *Star Queen* ordered them back.

"Get your spaceport health officer on the vision-phone," ordered the *Star Queen's* skipper. "We've had chlorophage on board."

There was panic. Even at a distance of a hundred thousand miles, chlorophage could strike stark terror into anybody. But presently the image of the spaceport health officer appeared on the *Star Queen's* screen.

"We're not landing," said Doctor Nordenfeld. "There's almost certainly an outbreak of chlorophage on Altaira, and we're going back to do something about it. It got on our ship with passengers from there. We've whipped it, but we may need some help."

The image of the health officer aground was a mask of horror for seconds after Nordenfeld's last statement. Then his expression became incredulous, though still horrified.

"We came on to here," said Doctor Nordenfeld, "to get you to send word by the first other ship to the Patrol that a quarantine has to be set up on Altaira, and we need to be inspected for recovery from chlorophage infection. And we need to pass on, officially, the discovery that whipped the contagion on this ship. We were carrying botanical specimens to Cassim and we discovered that they were immune to chlorophage. That's absurd, of course. Their green coloring is the same substance as in plants under Sol-type suns anywhere. They couldn't be immune to chlorophage. So there had to be something else."

"Was — was there?" asked the health officer.

"There was. Those specimens came from somewhere beyond Regulus. They carried, as normal symbiotes on their foliage, microörganisms unknown both on Kamerun and Altaira. The alien bugs are almost the size of virus particles, feed on virus particles, and are carried by contact, air, and so on, as readily as virus particles themselves. We discovered that those microörganisms devoured chlorophage. We washed them off the leaves of the plants, sprayed them in our air-room jungle, and they multiplied faster than the chlorophage. Our whole air supply is now loaded with an airborne antichlorophage organism which has made our crew and passengers immune. We're heading back to Altaira to turn loose our merry little bugs on that planet.

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It appears that they grow on certain vegetation, but they'll live anywhere there's phage to eat. We're keeping some chlorophage cultures alive so our microörganisms don't die out for lack of food!"

The medical officer on the ground gasped. "Keeping phage *alive*?"

"I HOPE you've recorded this," said Nordenfeld. "It's rather important. This trick should have been tried on Kamerun and Altaira and everywhere else new diseases have turned up. When there's a bug on one planet that's deadly to us, there's bound to be a bug on some other planet that's deadly to it! The same goes for any pests or vermin — the principle of natural enemies. All we have to do is find the enemies!"

There was more communication between the *Star Queen* and the spaceport on Circe III, which the *Star Queen* would not make other contact with on this trip, and presently the big liner headed back to Altaira. It was necessary for official as well as humanitarian reasons. There would need to be a health examination of the *Star Queen* to certify that it was safe for passengers to breathe her air and eat in her restaurants and swim in her swimming pools and occupy the six levels of passenger cabins she contained. This would have to be done by a Patrol ship, which would turn up at Altaira.

The *Star Queen's* skipper would be praised by his owners for not having driven the liner into a star, and the purser would be forgiven for the confusion in his records due to off-schedule operations of the big ship, and Jensen would find in the ending of all terror of chlorophage an excellent reason to look for appreciation in the value of the investments he was checking up. And Doctor Nordenfeld . . .

He talked very gravely to Kathy. "I'm afraid," he told her, "that your father isn't coming back. What would you like to do?"

She smiled at him hopefully. "Could I be your little girl?" she asked. Doctor Nordenfeld grunted. "Hm . . . I'll think about it."

But he smiled at her. She grinned at him. And it was settled.

— MURRAY LEINSTER

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(*Continued from page 5*)
we lost our rudder. It all sounds funny — like our boiler going out and being reconnected to the scuttlebutt, which, for those who haven't had the pleasure, is a drinking fountain, and our ack-ack and the DE's practicing on helium-filled balloons and not downing a single one, while, a day ahead of us, a cruiser was sunk — but funny it wasn't in waters like those, with more than a sufficiency of sharks and Portuguese men-of-war all around.

Up came our lovable top sergeant with the same challenge, when the chant was "Golden Gate in '48!" Again there was that awful clench and I said, "August 13th." But this time I was a bit smarter; I got 2-to-1 odds and a leeway of a month in either direction. I was off by only a day.

With the war over, I was beset by buddies wanting to know when they would be going home. I told them I didn't know about them, but I was leaving in February. Until recently, I thought I left in March. I didn't. It was February.

For those who collect such documented instances, please leave me out of it and hound the 1294th Combat Engineers for confirmation.

And, yes, I had my run-ins with telepathy as well as precognition. I have had no personal experience with the other psi factors, if any of them actually exist. And I have to get to my point in a rather round-about fashion.

Some time back, poker hunger brought me into contact with odd lots of people — writers and artists and editors, of course, but also composers, musicians, clothing manufacturers, a whole cross-section that eventually led to psychoanalysts — two, to be exact. One always looked green and ill; if you feel like laughing, hold on a moment — the evidence seems to indicate that only the sick can truly abide sickness.

The other analyst was big and bouncy — he had clearly been told in his analysis to be bouncy. He kicked off his shoes as soon as he entered, flung himself at furniture and women, and tried infuriatingly to play wild games. Traits aside, he's the one who counts here. He needed a Ph.D. thesis and asked if I had an idea. I did.

Camille Flammarion, a French astronomer of the 19th century, spent — as far as I know — his last years checking out reports of fisher folk knowing when their men were drowning at sea. Vivid dreams, sudden frightening visions, that sort of thing. Flammarion found that these were all but universal in the fishing vil-

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ages whenever the men put out. Only the ones that proved true were remembered. He naturally drew the wrong conclusion.

In the psych journals today, analysts are mooning around with startling examples of telepathy and foreknowledge in their patients, and, like Flammarion, drawing wrong conclusions, but for opposite reasons — the ones that have held psi in an iron grip since *Odd John*.

Olaf Stapledon, the author of *Odd John*, confessed even before being asked that he was not a storyteller, as if that weren't completely apparent. He came closest to telling a story in this book, however, and of course I used it as a Galaxy Novel — I'm a professional editor, which means I put aside my convictions if they get in the way of a story. But as a professional editor, had Stapledon been alive, I would have had him do two things:

— Tell the story entirely through the narrator, without once quoting Odd John. If he's that much beyond *sapiens*, John would be as incomprehensible, barring a handful of phrases, as a man to a dog. Instead, he sounds like a jackass, and an unforgivably wordy one.

— For the love of plain common sense, make that whole last section add up! Why go to all that trouble if that colony of psis, gathered with such care and secrecy, suddenly knows it is endangered — and goes under rather than disperse at once to protect its precious alleged genes?

But those two changes would be for story, nothing else. The common denominator would not be involved. Nor would it be now if that suction pump would get out of authors' typewriters. For psi must revert to just another theme, to be explored from *all* angles, not frozen to the belief that it is a superior faculty, or blasted out of our path.

Flammarion was the first to note that psi does not hold up under statistical conditions. But he was in the right place — the common denominator is anxiety.

Anyone who thinks that anxiety is a necessary or even useful human condition should envy Pavlov's dogs — anxiety is precisely what he was inducing and the pathetic creatures were doing their canine best to read him. They didn't do very well — and neither do humans; the accuracy is spottily startling, nothing to bet on as a whole.

Think back on the overwhelmings that temporarily made you a ham radio in a pstatic pstorm. You were functioning at your best? Higher faculty, huh?

—H. L. GOLD

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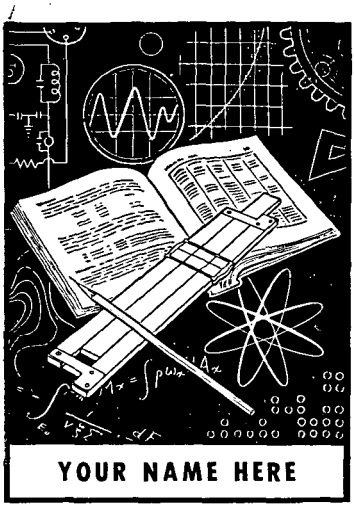

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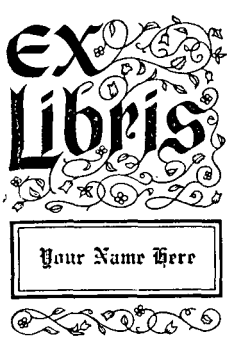

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